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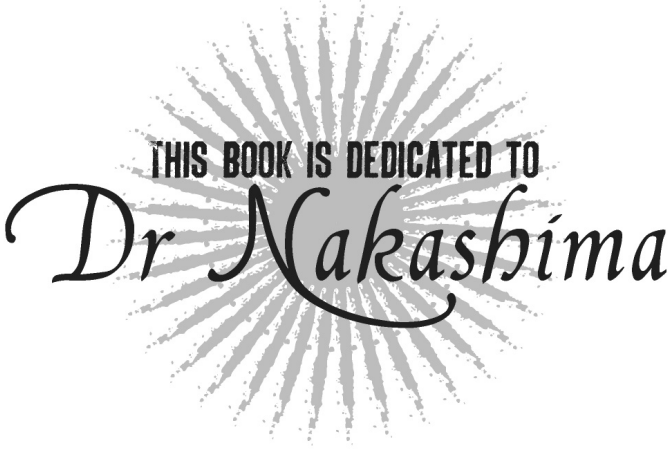

NOW THAT THE NINJA HAVE PASSED INTO THE PAGES OF HISTORY, ALL THAT REMAINS ARE THE ECHOES OF THEIR VOICES

PEERING INTO A WORLD OF SECRETS AND THE HIDDEN, WE CAN HAVE NO CERTAINTIES AND MAY ONLY INVESTIGATE.

THIS BOOK IS ONE SUCH INVESTIGATION.

BOOKS

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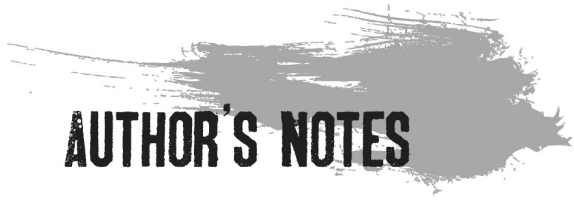


This book is based on magazine articles published in Combat Magazine and originally wrote with an aim of dismantling the considerable misconceptions that seem to surround our common understanding of these Ninja men and women of history. This book attempts to find a pathway through the mythology and to look beyond the modern creation that is the media version of the Ninja. Through logical investigation I will take you on a journey that will reinforce the element of the elite that the Ninja once stood for. My hope is that I can open your mind to the possibilities that you thought not possible.

What It will not do and that which is common to 'Ninjutsu students' is to spout and dribble hundreds of Japanese words and Ninjutsu terminology, in the hope that you will get confused and feel that the author is superior in knowledge. This principle is set with you now to display that the concept of a Ninjutsu expert does not exist. By definition the word expert is someone who is well versed and familiar with all elements of a given subject, and on this subject there are no experts. There are people who have a deep interest, there are people in love with the Ninja and there are those who try to discover what happened in that black and dark past but there are no experts in the true sense of the word. That, in mind I want you to join me in an 'investigation' into the world of the Ninja or Shinobi.

Chapter 1
In Reality what is a Ninja?

The first misconception you must put out of your mind is the word assassin in connection with the Ninja. This does not mean that Ninja sometimes did not assassinate people as a secondary activity but it was simply not a primary role. The concept of assassin is a commonly accepted one in most parts of the world, so why did the historical Ninja gain worldwide renown as the ultimate assassin figure? Moreover the question arises, what is a Ninja? When looking at the name Ninja and the surrounding terminology we hit on the word Shinobi or *Shinobi no mono*. Both reflect a person who uses Ninjutsu or is in fact a Ninja. If you analyse the ideogram for Ninja we find two main sections. The first is Heart and the second is Blade and as with all Japanese we can read this in a phonetic or symbolic way. Therefore, Ninja can be viewed as ‘perseverance’ or ‘adept of stealth’. As you can see the fundamental message lacks any hint or reference to assassination. We can read from the Japanese ideograms that a Shinobi no mono was a person who undertook a stealthy art and or had

perseverance under duress. Now, if you wipe clean your ‘slate’ and remove what you thought you knew about the Ninja and start to form an image of a person who is trained in all elements of stealth and can endure untold levels of hardships we can start to identify with what would be the base of the Shinobi.

Continuing along the theme of names for the Ninja, we know that such epithets as: Ninpei (Shinobi Soldiers), Suppa (thief), Rappa (Ruffian), Kusa (grass) were employed to describe their arts. This tends to trap most people investigating Ninja history. We perceive a word and give it an identifying label, a label with connotations often misdirected. Take the term ‘knight’. Consider knights at the end of the first millennium, then their counterparts in the Middle Ages, then a Victorian knight and finally the accolades given out each year by the Queen. All are knights, all are under the same banner, yet all differ immensely. As with the Ninja of all over Japan and from chronological diversities we will find that they are also dissimilar in some respects. A Ninja is not a product of ‘machine manufacture’ but an artist of skill with personal traits that resemble the needs of the world around them.

A fundamental misconception is that of the Ninja as a person and an identity as apposed to a skill. There is debate as to whether the Ninja existed at all or if ‘Ninja’ was simply a set of skills used by those who trained in the art. I argue however, that this is redundant, for even if the art of the Ninja is just a set of skills taught to different people it stands to reason

that person is a Ninja by default. But what does come out of this debate is that the concept of the Ninja being a separate class is not wholly correct. We do know through historical records such as the Shoninki (True Ninja account) that there were sections of the Samurai class that did adopt Ninjutsu as a skill and were classed as adepts of the Ninja arts. Here we have a most tantalizing piece of historical evidence for this, from the Samurai Katsuda Nangusai Yoshin of the Kishu Domain, he writes the following text in reference to the Ninja:

Lately, Fujinoissuishi Masatake Jofu has recorded this secret document on the art of Ninpei by his own hand. The esoteric way of this writing is extremely scrupulous and subtle. If you attentively trust in and perform these skills, there wouldn't be a single warrior you couldn't deceive, no matter how prudent and discreet he was. Doubtlessly you would be able to take hold of the enemy by your tactics and have a complete control over them, by having them within the palm of your hand. It seems almost magical, this art of night stealth which enables you to make yourself invisible in the black of night.

(1681)

THE WAY THEY WROTE 'NINJA'

The first thing you should know about the Japanese language is that it was a fully developed and spoken language well before it was a written one. It is said that the Kanji characters of the Japanese language came to Japan from China in around the 6th century BC. You must understand that words in Japan existed before the written form, which in the case of much of western speech was historically mainly the other way around. Also consider that the Japanese had to pick the Kanji that they thought represented the word and which also had the phonetic sound. Thus, for example Shinobi no Mono (忍者) 'a person who steals in', consists of the Kanji for 'steal-in' 忍 and there is also the Kanji for person 者. Thus, the word Shinobi was there before the written form. That does not mean that the Shinobi existed in the 6th century (no one can place their origin, of this we simply do not know) but it does mean that when the Shinobi came about, they were given a name and then chosen Kanji were put in place after the naming. This is why we have variations on the Kanji for the word Ninja. It is

fundamental in understanding the Ninja to understand how people historically recorded them.

忍

Pronunciation: Shinobi or Nin
Meaning: The basic form of Nin which consists of 'blade' above a 'heart' it has the dual meaning of to 'steal-in' or 'perseverance'.
Information: This is by far the most common version of the word Shinobi that is written today. Historically it was used to refer to the activity of creeping or stealing-in and also as a reference to a person. This is also the basic element of most words connected with the Ninja; it is the foundational Kanji character that may use almost any verb ending put onto it to describe Ninja-like activities. For example, Shinobi-Iru (忍び入る) *to enter in a stealthy way* or Shinobi-Iku (忍び行く) *to go discreetly*.

忍者

Pronunciation: Ninja or Shinobi no mono
Meaning: This is the basic form of Nin with the ending of 'person' or a person who 'steals in'
Information: This is the most popular Kanji character for the Ninja, it is the iconic version and now the only one used to mean Ninja in modern Japanese. Some authorities claim that it is a modern invention but these people are incorrect, since we can see this word as early as the 17th century and used in the Shoninki manual.

忍術

Pronunciation: Ninjutsu or Shinobi no jutsu
Meaning: **'**The art of stealing-in': *Nin* is the base Kanji and *jutsu*, as is well know, means 'the art of'.
Information: The original reading for this is Shinobi no jutsu but alternatively it can be read as Ninjutsu which is now more popular. This is used to describe the arts of the Ninja or for a person who can use the skills of the Ninja arts. Thus, it does not have to be a Ninja by definition, it can be a samurai who has learnt some methods and is referring to using this skill. Remember, this is the action of and not the description for the person themselves.

忍法

Pronunciation: Ninpo
Meaning: The way of the Ninja
Information: The Kanji for 'Po' usually means 'the laws or morals you should follow' or 'the way to do something'. The latter is more pragmatic and refers to the way 'to do, to act'. However, we have to remember that Ninjutsu is NOT a martial art and using 'Po' here has little or minimal difference to 'Jutsu' Many modern 'Ninja students' believe that 'Po' is the spiritual side of Ninjutsu, this is incorrect and there is no evidence for this. This Kanji may be interpreted as 'laws of the Ninja' or 'principles of the Ninja' or it may simply be an alternative way of expressing Ninjutsu. We do know that this also appears in the Shoninki and therefore it

is at least as old as 1681.

忍兵

Pronunciation: Ninpei
Meaning: Shinobi Soldiers
Information: This is a rare, old version of Ninja which is used in the written form only. It is rare because it is written by people of high status when referring to people lower then themselves. The second Kanji 兵 is used for foot soldiers by the military elite and thus, this means 'Ninja foot soldiers'. We do know from the manual Gunpo that an average army of around 4000 would have around 20 Ninjas in their retinue and were used and integrated with the samurai, that is if the Ninjas themselves were not samurai using Ninjutsu. Therefore, this is a sophisticated way of writing about Ninja agents when penned by the military elite. As a point of interest this was the Kanji chosen for the title of this work 'Shinobi Soldiers'.

窃盗((or 竊 in the old form of first character)

Pronunciation: Shinobi (also this can be read as Setto- stealing, but it sounds very modern.)
Meaning: There are two Kanji here, the first 窃 (or 竊) means 'sneaking or spying' the second 盗 means 'thievery, stealing or thief', thus it could be translated as 'a person who steals and spies': it is interesting to point out that it is also pronounced as Shinobi, the original word for Ninja.

Information: This version of Shinobi is as old as 1615 at least and reinforces the aspect of stealing and thievery that the Ninja were originally linked to, around the beginning of the Ninja's 'golden age'. So-called modern Ninja masters have sought to take Ninjutsu away from this concept, but the historical Kanji always reminds us of the fact that a Ninja was in essence a spy and a cat-burglar.

IS NINJUTSU A MARTIAL ART

*Is Ninjutsu a martial art?...*No!
*Does it have martial arts in it?…*No!
*Do Ninjas learn martial arts?...*Yes!
To understand this simply, there were what we could class as a Ninja (that is, a man being brought up in the mountain regions of Koka and Iga and other such places) learning the Shinobi arts. Also, it is noteworthy that there were sections of the Samurai class learning Ninjutsu, or having been taught Ninjutsu. We know this to be a basic given fact and we can verify this by historical documents and accounts. This leads to the question, if the Samurai also studied Ninjutsu, then what were they learning? Surely a Samurai would be an extremely competent martial artist? Some people automatically say, *'well, they must have learnt secret weapons'*, this is a mute reply, as most of the weapons we think of as Ninja

weapons were in fact open to other Samurai martial arts schools. Hidden canes, throwing stars, chain weapons etc, all can be verified as being used outside of the realm of the Ninja. Therefore we must ask, what did the Samurai learn when they were taught Ninjutsu?

If we look to the birthplace of the Ninja: Iga and Koga in Mie/Shiga prefecture, they were at the time of the Ninja, basically a separate state unto themselves, a self ruling body. Should this not put them on a comparable level to the Samurai, the elite warrior aristocracy? Or did the Iga state have a recognized Samurai family itself…it seems so according to the Iranki document? These questions are difficult to answer, and to some extent both questions are irrelevant. We must wonder that if warrior elites were to go to learn Ninjutsu as an external skill, what were they learning? Since it could not be fighting styles they were to learn.

The comparisons between battlefield martial arts developed before the Edo period and modern Ninpo Taijutsu (skill with the body) taught today will lead you to a very clear conclusion, they both look the same. Thus, modern 'Ninpo Taijustu' is a form of Kobudo or old martial arts. This fits in perfectly with the argument that battlefield martial arts are just a small section of a Ninja's needs, whereas now it is the main focus of today's Ninjutsu students. This still leaves the glaring question, what were the other sections that were taught? There are three major texts on Ninjutsu from the medieval period, the

Bansenshukai, the Shoninki and the Ninpiden. Out of over 20 volumes in the Bansenshukai, only 5 are about weaponry/tools, there are no references to martial arts in the Shoninki (Lit: *True Ninja Account*) and the Ninpiden deals with espionage tools. This information or lack of martial information is a startling indication that the arts of Ninjutsu were predominantly that of espionage and infiltration. We can postulate with reasonable faith that, using the original sources, to be a Shinobi, was *not* the way of learning Ninpo Taijutsu martial arts, but to understand how to infiltrate and disturb the enemy, to creep in and gain secrets and or to dispose of people, stores or buildings (by fire). Furthermore, there are in-depth references to psychology, meteorology, esoteric rituals, endurance testing amongst a range of non-martial pursuits. We have been led to believe that to learn the arts of the Ninja today, is to learn how to fight or kill with weapons. When in fact, life as a warrior, or for that matter a Ninja, during the feudal age, was to be able to fight and kill: a fundamental need. It is comparable to asking a modern day butcher about his trade and he then give you a 10 year lesson on sharpening knives. A fundamental section of his training, but it will not teach you how to be a butcher. Like Ninjutsu training, if all you do is learn how to fight, you have only ventured into the basics. Yet we have 'Ninjutsu Masters' around the world claiming to teach Shinobi no Jutsu (the original way to pronounce Ninjutsu), and their curriculum is comprised only of fighting. I am yet to see the DVD on sale that is a Ninjutsu DVD that teaches meteorology or arson! What good would it do you to creep into a camp, kill

the guards and then not be able to set that camp on fire using the same stealth and efficiency used during infiltration? ‘Erm, could someone lend me a match please?!’

This brings us to the point that, when you hear of Ninjutsu, you should not understand it as a selection of martial artists dressed in black making an investigation into body movement, no matter how skilled they are. I suggest that you see them instead as a selection of people studying Kobudo, old martial arts. Thus, when you think of the Ninja, consider the rigorous training and spectrum of abilities you would need to acquire in order to operate as a spy, an infiltrator, an arsonist, a meteorologist, a con-artist, a survival expert, a doctor, a disguise artist, a fighter, a horseman, an archer, a botanist and more than likely, a brutal and ruthless killer of men. Today we think of the Ninja as a spiritual warrior, but what we forget is that these were men of pure daring and capability, true warriors beyond that of most modern martial artists.

AFTERTHOUGHT

I once had the honour of speaking with a SAS veteran of the Second World War. He was around 85, yet still recounted to me with disturbing clarity how he had killed men, many of them by infiltration and the knife. His eyes were that of those few men you occasionally come across in life that are truly dangerous. His eyes really lit up with killer instinct as he told me some of the Germans he killed had begged

to be left alive; he said that he had smiled when he told them that 'they were soldiers and should die with honour.' No matter what style of martial artist you care to name, no matter if they are a world champion or a street fighter, I would dare any of them to face that shadow in the dark without fear. Imagine a man who out of nowhere grips you in his bare hands, and whilst forcing a dagger into your heart he tells you to die with honour. For me, that is what the 'Ninja' is: a man of true daring.

Where did Ninjas come from? Some say they were born out of a political need in the region around Iga. Others claim that they were brought from abroad into the land of Japan. These are the two main arguments for the origins of the Ninja but most people side on the idea that the Ninja were 'imported weapons' from China who took up residence in the mountains of Iga. From a historical context it is practically impossible to trace the movements of possible Ninja from China to Japan and therefore completely pointless in trying to verify this using demographic movement patterns. What we do know for 100% certain is that the

Chinese did not use the word Ninja or the different variations of the Chinese ideograms that the Japanese used to say Shinobi. Thus, some people claim that as there is no mention of the Ninja in the Chinese documents that we have left, they did not therefore exist there. However, this may not be the case, as we have good evidence in another document to tell us that the Ninjas did in fact start in China. The author of the Bansenshukai and the author of the Shoninki state without hesitation that the origins for the Ninja were in fact China and the adoption of Ninjutsu was taken from the teachings of the Chinese classics. The Bansenshukai goes into much more depth about this subject and says that the origin of Ninjutsu goes back to 2850 BC and is paraphrased in the Chinese classic *The Art of War* by Sun Tzu. The author of the Bansenshukai feels that Ninjutsu was used throughout the ancient Chinese world and that it was always there, he even goes on to mention why they changed the reference-name of the Ninja time and time again. He states that the names of the Ninja change as the skills in Ninjutsu adapt to the political situation around them, thus they change their name to reflect the time. He also states that the reason that they, the Ninja of Japan use the word Ninja or Shinobi in the format of the classic ideogram of a 'Heart and a Blade' is to denote that a Ninja should have a heart as hard as a blade of iron and thus will be able to achieve anything. On the other hand, we cannot gain any information about the type of Ninjutsu that was performed when referred to as Shinobi.

There is always one element that we have to contend with when dealing with historians who are actually a part of history themselves. They could be wrong! Modern academics understand that those in history did not have access to the bigger picture nor to the details that we often acquire through, for instance, archaeology. The Ninja from Koka who wrote the Bansenshukai, referencing some very real books of his time (some now lost), tells a compelling history and appears to be the only enduringly reliable authority we have on the history of the Ninja. So we have two alternatives in discussing the origin of the Ninjas, firstly, it is quite possible that the Ninja were from China or that at least their skills were, it is not only probable but also likely. However, we must also consider the view that the Ninja may have claimed to be from China because China was seen as more cultured from the Japanese point of view, thus they were giving themselves validation by such claims.

We can say with some certainty that the art of Ninjutsu (in some form) has been in existence for at least 2000 years and that it may have started in China where the Ninja were called *Kan* 間. From there Ninjutsu probably moved to Japan either through the study of military classics or through the movement of people. What is certain is that an art form was perfected in Japan, and the words Shinobi and Ninja became the main names at the start of the Edo period. However this marks the beginning of the end of the Ninja, although the Edo period has been resurrected by modern media as their golden age.

THE NAMES FOR NINJA USED IN CHINESE HISTORY

This following list states the words used in China that the author of the Bansenshukai believes to be Ninja and why he believes them to be so. Also it is an oversimplified list; it has been made that way so that it is a gate into the world of the 'Chinese Ninja' and thus the origins of the Japanese Ninja. Therefore treat this list as an opening to what could be a very large area. The meanings are very basic understandings and are there so that you can get a feel of what the basic names mean. To do a full investigation into these names would be a much larger project.

Kan 間
Meaning: 'Gap' or 'estrange'
Kan is the main name used for 'Chinese Ninja' and the basic meaning is a gap or opening that one uses, such as a weakness in the enemy or to abuse the information you have in order to gain an opening. Thus they used to be called Kanjin or 'people of the opening'. On the other hand if you break the ideogram down it means 'sun coming through a gate' and thus it can be interpreted as sunlight entering through even the smallest gap of the enemies defences. Lastly, it can also mean *estrange*, that is to 'estrange the enemy lord from his people', -his retainers and his neighbouring warlords and to leave him helpless.
If you are looking for the equivalent word for Ninja in the Chinese texts then look no further than Kan.

Kancho 間諜
Meaning: ‘Detect an opening or to spy in general’
This is quite straight forward and simply *means those who detect*. Connected with the important word ‘Kan.’

Cho 諜
Meaning: ‘to spy or detect’
This is quite straight forward and simply means *those who detect*. Connected with the important word ‘Kan.’

Kojin 行人
Meaning: ‘Person who goes’
A simple if philosophical name referring to the world of the Ninja.

Saisaku 細作
Meaning: ‘To make up in detail’
The basic need in Ninjutsu is the need for excellent recording of details, as we have seen in all the manuscripts a Ninja is the ultimate collector of details!

Yushi 遊士
Meaning: ‘playing warrior’
This is quite an interesting take on Ninjutsu. Here it appears to mean to play, seem stupid or even mean a base character. In reality it holds a very esoteric message about the plots behind each mission and being able to play the situation in a way you want to.

Yutei 遊偵,
Meaning: 'To play and detect'
Again, this is not difficult to link with the ways of Ninjutsu.

REFERENCES TO THE WORLD OF THE NINJA USED IN JAPANESE HISTORY

Kansai 姦細
Meaning: 'Wicked'
The ideogram used here insinuates it is a man who uses evil or wickedness to gain what they need and thus we have the origin to the dark and evil image of the Ninja.

Kyoudan 響談
Meaning: Kyo 'to give a feast', *dan* means to "talk".
To feast someone so that he will give away secrets.

Mitsumono 三者
Meaning: 'three men'
Takeda Shingen divided his Ninja into three groups as part of his tactics, thus we get *three men.*

Nokizaru 軒猿
Meaning: 'A monkey in the eaves'
This is possibly the most image-conjuring name for the Ninja as this gives us the classic picture of the climbing expert hiding in the roof vaults and listening to those secret conversations. There is another theory

that Nokizaru comes from another name for the *Yellow Emperor of China*, who is said to have used spies.

Rappa 乱波, 乱破
Meaning: 'to confuse' and 'waves' or 'break'
This may have been merely a phonetic transference and not a Kanji or ideogram representation. In some ancient writings there is a mention of "those thieves called Rappa used in the employ of warfare". Also in a famous account of the Hojo clan, it says enigmatically that there were scoundrels called Rappa who were thieves but at the same time not thieves and that these Rappa were employed widely by Daimyos (lords).

Suppa　透波, 透破、水破、素っ破
Meaning: 'transparent' or 'look' or go through" and 'waves'.
Suppa was also used to mean scoundrels such as pickpockets, thieves, frauds. But it is unknown which use is older.

WHAT WAS A NINJA'S JOB

If we were to ask the question on the street, 'what was a Ninja's Job', what answer would be given? A high percentage would surely say 'assassin'. A few people might say 'spy'. But what was the job of a Ninja? Again we must first qualify two things:

1. A Ninja is not a set figure but a person trained in needed skills across a thousand year history
2. The ideogram for Ninja is a blade above a heart and can mean either, 'perseverance' or 'to creep in/ adept of stealth'.

This does not mean that the Ninja did not perform assassinations but it does mean that a Ninja is not an assassin by nature. The job description for a Ninja would be quite long and detailed but the word assassin would only be a minor part. As a Ninja your job would be set into these four areas:

THE SHINOBI CV

FUNDAMENTAL NEEDS:
To be able to survive in the wild using bush craft, be an adept in the martial arts and the use of weaponry to a master level, to be able to swim and stay submerged for extended periods, to understand basic chemistry for the use of explosives, understand medicine and herbal law as well as toxins, to know many geographical areas and their customs, tourist points and dialects, to be able to impersonate priests and their rituals, musicians and street entertainers etc, to be psychologically sound and not to reveal stress under high pressure (hence the name 'perseverance'), to have fire-starting skills and understand the principles of arson, the understanding of written codes and code breaking and to have an understanding of meteorology.

INFILTRATION NEEDS:
To understand or glean passwords and secret codes so as to gain entry into forbidden places, to be able to adopt a trade and infiltrate yourself into a community, to deal with undercover stress and work in enemy territory, to have an in-depth knowledge of conversation and 'police style' investigation and conversation tactics, be adept at burglary, con-artistry and forgery.

STEALTH NEEDS:
To understand and be able to use an array of breaking-and-entering tools, to travel across mountains and forests without being identified, to

have the ability to free-climb and scale walls with the aide of climbing equipment, to understand the principles of camouflage and moving in shadows, the ability to move with stealth, to be able to work in teams, to understand the sleeping patterns of humans and animals, to be able to identify a false sleeper and be able to understand where to tread on wooden structures to create the least amount of friction to have an understanding of assassination skills and the ability to kill with the minimum noise and effort.

PHILOSOPHICAL NEEDS:
To have an understanding of Zen and esoteric Buddhism (including the infamous Kuji-in), to be proficient in physiognomy (the ability to read a persons personality via their facial or body types, a skill now being reinvestigated by the scientific world), to have a full understanding of charms, spells for destruction or pacification and ritualistic magic, to have some understanding of fortune telling and palmistry, high level psychology, to be a cold reader and to have a stout heart and the ability to deal with stress under life-threatening situations.

This would be the job description for a Shinobi Soldier, and if you are a Ninjutsu student you need to seriously ask yourself 'am I learning these things?' – And if not why not? After reading all of the above we can start to get an understanding of the extremities that a Shinobi would be able to go to, we start to understand why they are renowned as they are. We

can start to see the truth behind the myth. People on the whole are in mixed awe and submerged envy at any of humanity's great warriors of history: the Spartans, the Samurai, the Vikings and so on, -people who were feared have always been given fame and respect, and it is no different for the Ninja. We all wish we could be like this, some of us know we could be if we were brought up in that world, alas we have not, so we can do the next best thing and that is study and emulate. If as humans we can master even a portion of what the Ninja were, we will be great people in our age, but then people may ask what is the point? But I would reflect, then what is the point of life, if not to excel in all things and enrich the human mind and make your heart stronger.

KOGA NINJA VS. IGA NINJA

KOKA & IGA: THE MISCONCEPTION

Throughout most of the Ninja media is the very common understanding that all Ninja come from either Koka or Iga and that the two Ninja factions were in fact at constant war. One can see this warfare is constant in the imaginary image of the Ninja. The Japanese film Shinobi portrays this war as its central theme as does the animation version entitled Basilisk. It seems to be a modern myth that these two Ninja

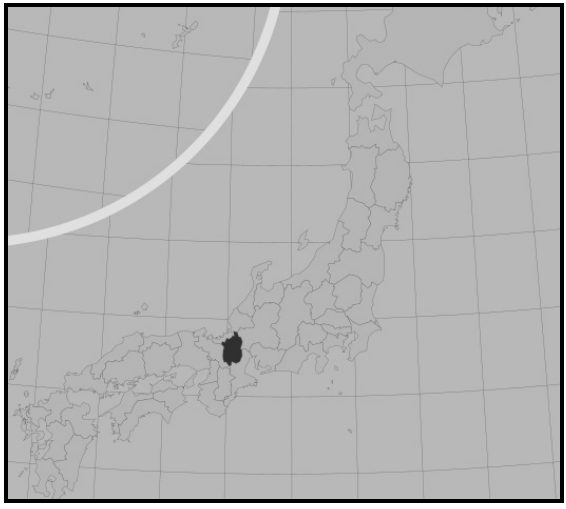
clans were at war and that they had a deep routed blood hatred for each other. We know little of both Koka & Iga's formations and their connection with Ninjutsu's origins. But what we do know is that these two places were the most famous of all the Ninja clans. People do not realise that Ninja clans existed all over Japan and are recorded. However, Iga is attributed to the start of Ninjutsu which is a fact that we can neither prove nor disprove. What is concrete is that the Iga clan were without doubt classed as the premiere Ninjutsu clan, even to the point that one name for the Ninja is *Iga no Mono* or Men of Iga. Geographically the two areas border on each other and or the same area in all but name.

KOKA

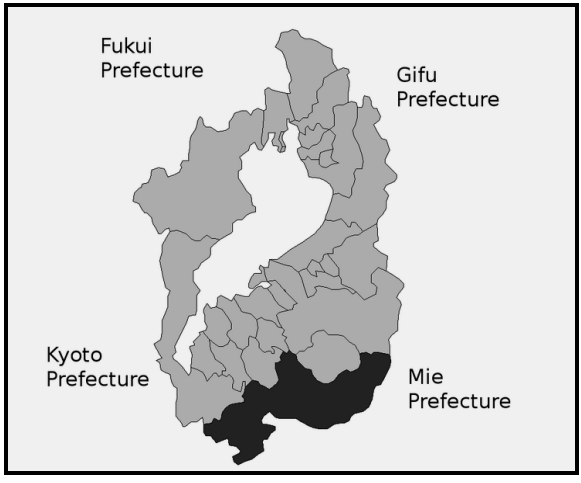
For years now we have always known ***Koka*** by the word ***Koga***, which is the common English spelling. However, the difference between the Japanese *Ka* and *Ga* is almost insignificant to the English ear. The reason that I have chosen to change the spelling is the fact that Koka is technically the correct version and the aim of *Shinobi Soldiers* is to investigate the truth of the Ninja.

Koka is in the modern day city of the same name which is found in the Shiga prefecture on the main island of Honshu.

SHIGA PREFECTURE



KOKA



The most famous Koka Ninja was a man called Fujibayashi Yasutake who wrote the major Ninjutsu manual called the Bansenshukai. When he signs his masterwork on Ninjutsu he signs it in the following manner:

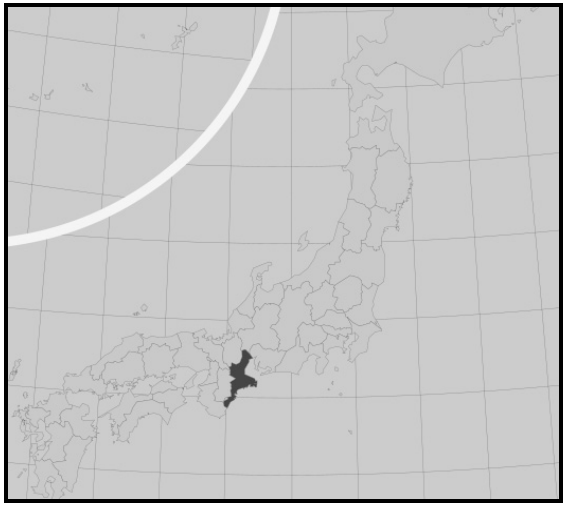
Enpo 4 (1676) Summer
Written by Koshu Kokagun Retired Warrior,
Fujibayashi Yasutake

You may be drawn to the word Kokagun, this means 'of the area of Koka'. Interestingly the towns of Iga and Koka argue among themselves as to where Fujibayashi Yasutake was from. Fujibayashi Yasutake's house is technically in Iga but he signs himself as Koka, thus the seeds of argument were sown. However, what the modern people of Koka and Iga do not know is that once there bonds of friendship between the two people.

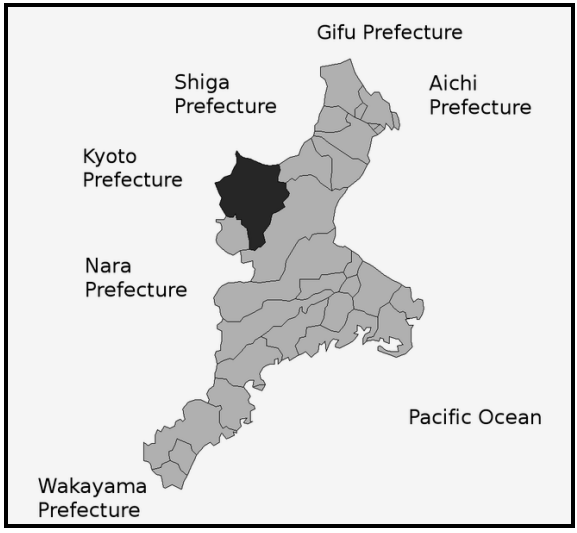
IGA

Iga, like Koka, is a mountainous area and is special in Japanese history. Up until the Iranki wars, that was the defeat of the Iga clans by Oda Nobunaga, Iga was a separate state external to Japanese central rule. They were a self governing body of mountain families who are believed to be Ninja families. Iga is found in modern day Mie prefecture and is home to the official Iga Ninja museum.

MIE PREFECTURE



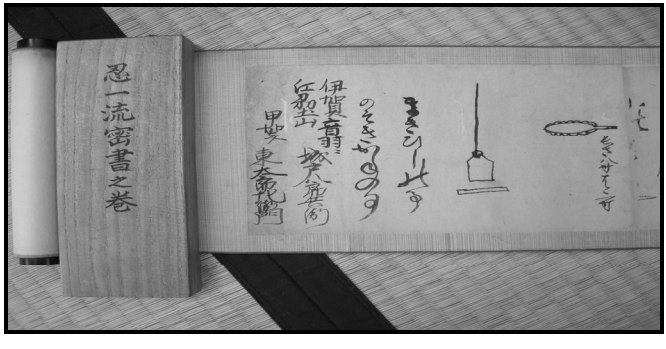
IGA



ONE PEOPLE AND ONE NINJA?

The problem with the warring Ninja factions theory of the modern media is that it only shows one side of the story. We have been led to believe that on sight Koka and Iga Ninjas would kill each other. This is simply not true. While we assume there was some confrontation between the two, there is another side to the coin. We have historical evidence that there were indeed bonds of friendship between them. One big question is *when* these two clans were actually at war with each other. Were they at war constantly but held bonds of friendship when the province was threatened? Or were their intermittent periods of peace where they became friends? Whatever the answer, our investigation shows that there was an element of trust and friendship between the two.

THE EVIDENCE
THE SCROLL



Dr Nakashima owns the scroll *Shinobi Ichiryu* which in rough translation means *The Ninja scroll of Secret Letters* which has a very interesting ending. The signatures at the end name two Ninjas as the authors. They are:

Kido Hachirouemon of Iga
Daizaburo Kitaemon of Koka

Thus, we see (opposed to the classic image of Ninjas killing each other) instead the two factions writing books together –probably over lots of □sake! Also, in the Bansenshukai it says that the Ninja Kido of Koka, was one of the top 11 Ninjas whose best skill was creeping in at night.

THE PROMISE

There is a sacred oath taken by the people of Iga and Koka, a promise that affirms their friendship beyond doubt. The following extract is taken from the Shoninki manual of 1681.

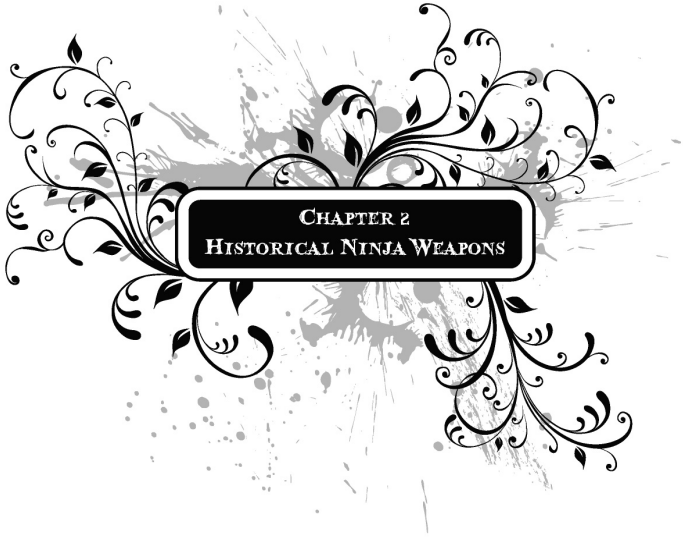
Later, the people from Kōga 甲賀, next to Iga 伊賀 followed this path of Ninjutsu and having made the oath of Ichigun Ichimi 一郡一味, the friendship oath of 'one district and one band', joining the people together, they went out expansively to various provinces to utilize their skills. Thus, being universally recognized as the premier Shinobi they exchanged a firm written form

of oath which says "If I come to where you are, you should show me everything of your province, and if you come to where I am, I will show you everything about my province". By doing this, it is said they should show that their family tradition was extraordinarily exquisite and outstanding and also show the marvel of their tradition of Ninjutsu, at its best.

SHARING INFORMATION

Interestingly, the historical manuals tell us of one trick to get the information you need if you wish to infiltrate an enemy stronghold. They say as a Ninja you should visit the Ninja clan of that area and ask for the information, even if that Ninja clan are in the employ of the enemy! It just goes to show the strength of the bond they must have had if they were willing to sell out their own employers.

So there you have it, sometimes at war and sometimes not and sometimes one people, one land and a secret spy network that went beyond the imagination!



Chapter 2
Historical Ninja Weapons

If we list the Ninja weapons we commonly see in the media, we get:

1. The Ninja Sword
2. The Throwing Star
3. The Hand and Foot Claws
4. Hidden Weapons
5. Caltrops
6. Chain length
7. Hand Held Bar
8. Finger Rings With Spikes
9. Rice Flails
10. Sickles with Chains
11. Claws that attach to the Backs of hands
12. Knuckle Dusters

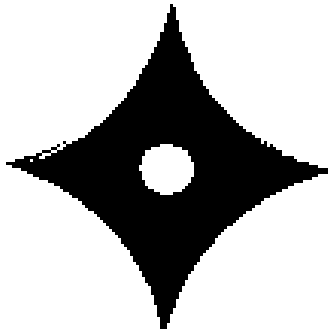
Now if we ask how many of the above weapons were actually used by the Ninja, the answer would be difficult since, as we have discussed, the concept of

Ninja is not so easy to pin down. Thus, if we restate the question as to 'who else used the above weapons?' then we may get a better picture of who is using what!

THE NINJA SWORD

As for as the modern understanding of the Ninja sword goes, it did not exist, we know the Ninja preferred the O-wakazashi with a longer cord, but so did many other people. So the Ninja sword is a dead start, this is not a 'Ninja weapon'.

THE THROWING STAR

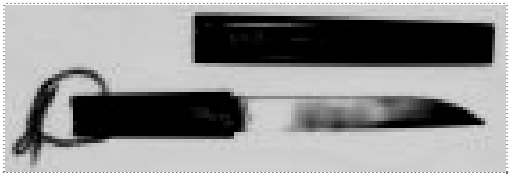


The Shuriken is by far the most iconic Ninja weapon there is and by far the most misrepresented. We have been told by some 'masters' that the Ninja star was a secret weapon. This is simply not the case, there were many samurai martial arts schools who taught the art of shuriken-jutsu. Shuriken schools are not even attributed to the Ninja in any way whatsoever, you will find no historical document telling you how the Ninja used a shuriken or that they were used by them alone. However, we can be quite certain that the Shinobi did in fact use them at least, as they were fairly commonplace. Therefore, is the shuriken a Ninja weapon? No. Did they use it?…Yes.

THE HAND & FOOT CLAWS

These are the most difficult Ninja items to identify, as the origins of these weapons seem quite obscure and thus no firm statement can be made about these, they are discussed more in the climbing section.

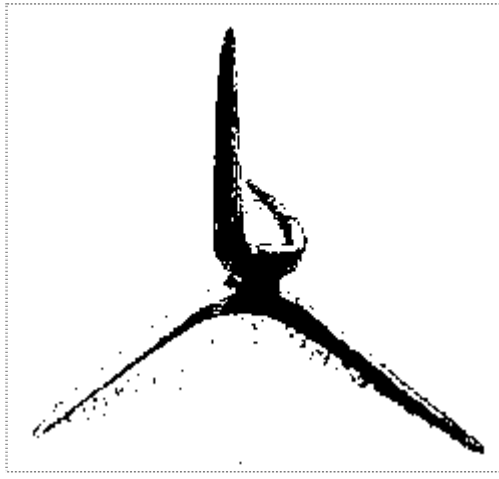
HIDDEN WEAPONS



The moment you are told that a knife-fan, cane-sword or any other type of hidden weapon is a secret 'Ninja weapon' politely thank the person who is talking to

you and leave. Hidden weapons are a worldwide certainty, most cultures with laws have them, the samurai did use them and there is no evidence to say that the Ninja invented them, any so-called master who has published or spoken of them as 'Ninja weapons' is a fraud.

CALTROPS

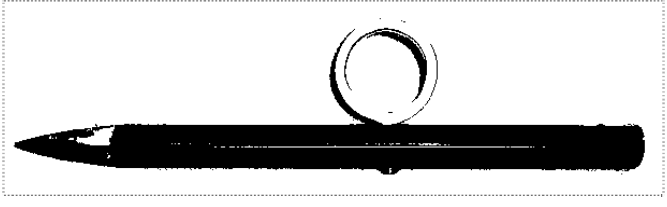


These small weapons were definitely used by the Ninja, in fact they crop up more then most. However, they were also used by western knights in the middle ages to bring horses down. So, were they invented by the Ninja?…No.

CHAIN LENGTH

Chain weapons in any form were well-spread around the east and in Japan, it is as simple as that. They were used by many and were most certainly not invented by the Shinobi.

HANDHELD BAR

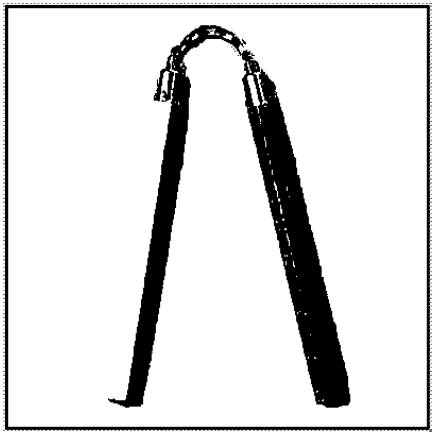


This weapon, held in the hand and used to strike nerve points was used by several Jujutsu schools and were definitely not a Ninja invention.

FINGER –RINGS WITH SPIKES

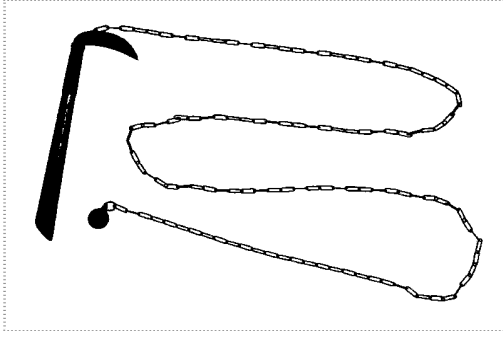
Known as 'horned rings' these were rings with teeth on the outside to help create pain during a grab. They were used by some Jujutsu schools and have a vague but unproven connection to the Ninja.

RICE FLAILS



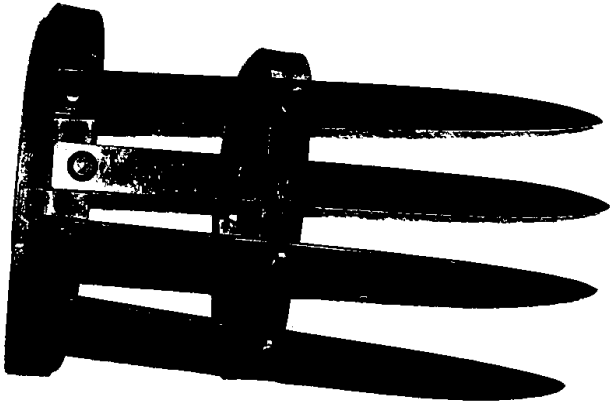
If any one tells you that this is a 'Ninja weapon' ask them where the English flail weapon comes from? I say this simply because these were farming tools, they have only been attached to the Shinobi by common default.

SICKLES WITH CHAINS



Again, this farming implement was a farmer's weapon, unless it was the purpose-built version that came about later in the Samurai age, then it was a warrior's weapon. We do know that the Ninja used this type of 'kama' as it is mentioned by Hattori Hanzo.

CLAWS THAT ATTACH TO THE BACKS OF HANDS



Again a very good contender for the Ninja weapon but also obscure in origin.

KNUCKLE DUSTERS

Bands of iron wrapped around the fist to help you smash skulls, yes this was used by many people in many cultures. A Ninja weapon?…No!

Now we have established that there are possibly very few or no weapons that can be classed as Ninja weapons, we have to ask the question, what weapons did a Ninja use?…The answer must be- all of the above! The debate here is NOT what weapons a Ninja used but what weapons are classed as Ninja weapons? Weapons are simply weapons and a Ninja is a form of spy/007 figure. Weapons were used and not created by the Ninja, we know that the weapons above were around in Japan at the time and that most were used by a lot of different people (especially the allegedly 'definitive Ninja weapon': the shuriken).

Therefore, if someone is telling you that *this is a secret Ninja weapon*, or *this is how a Ninja used it* then they are wrong. If they are saying a Ninja *may* have used this, then that would be more correct. On the whole we do not know how Ninjas trained for combat, we simply know that they utilized the tools around them.

The question of who could carry a sword in Japan is always answered with the resounding chorus of 'The Samurai!' This is not only incorrect but completely misleading. The Samurai have a thousand year history and it is a common misconception that only they could wear swords and only people born into a Samurai family could be Samurai. We know that in the early periods almost anyone could become a Samurai, you just had to take that path. It is only later in history do we get the Samurai becoming a hereditary institution. The greatest example of this was Toyotomi Hideyoshi. He was born a peasant but became the ruler of Japan and, ironically, it was he that segregated the Samurai from the peasants by the disarmament of the farmers in 1588. Furthermore, it is only after the 1500s that the ruling class started to control the swords people wore to denote what rank they were. This truly came into effect during the Edo period of peace, which also correlates to the decline of the Ninja. Therefore, we must understand, at the height of the Ninja's golden years (pre-Edo period –

before AD 1600), each and every person could carry weapons if they so wished, it was only the type of weapon that was restricted towards the end.

Fujinoisshuishi Masatake, a Ninja from the 1600s tells us that one of the main tools a Shinobi should use is the O-Wakazashi, or short sword, the 'O' means larger, so the O-Wakazashi is a short sword that is just inches shorter then the Katana or long sword. He says this is the best sword to carry is it is the most common. As we know the Samurai carried two swords we can take this to mean that the 'average Joe' carried a short sword for protection. When we look at martial arts today, we concentrate on grappling or knock-outs and such. Imagine a world where most people carried a 50 cm hatchet or blade! Try to envisage a street-fight where two aggressors are hacking fillets of flesh off each other, or severing main arteries and blood is gushing down the street. Add to this image a Ninja, trained since birth at fighting with blades. Can we truly comprehend what it means to train day in and day out since birth with a blade? The only comparison that we have is a Chinese gymnast, taken to a camp at a young age and trained and trained. Imagine what skill a person would have with that upbringing, not only that but the probable fact that they may not care if you die? What kind of mentality are we dealing with? How do you grapple that? Would you cheer if you had struck a blow? Perhaps you had broken a rib?…Or maybe you died in the street pumping blood on the pavement as they cut off your limbs? We do not laugh or jibe at knife-stabbings in the west. We do not laugh when

people are attacked by a gang with knives; I know no martial arts school that does not warn about the dangers of knives. So why then do people mock traditional arts, when the aggressor is no longer a yob with a knife, but a trained warrior with a bigger one!? This is a simple fact, that we must understand that in our past, both at home and in Japan, it was not illegal to carry weapons. The illegality of carrying weapons is in fact only a modern concept. That is why we have given birth to the 'Sports Martial Arts' and their false bravado. No man withstands a cut-out throat, no man can argue with a knife in the ribs, no matter how big or strong you are. In this sense we must start to see the Ninja again, not only as highly trained and highly disciplined figure, but a figure who would put real fear in you. People say, 'I would not like a punch off Mike Tyson' –but I say I would prefer that to a Ninja with a short sword. One I may survive, the other I would surely die. Violence in our time and during that of the historical Ninja has changed dramatically.

This leads to the 'Ninja sword' –the classic straight bladed weapon with a square guard. Did the Ninjas have a sword? Yes, they did, as we have seen. What made them different to other swords? Not much. There is reference to swords having air-holes in the scabbard for people to breathe through, but on the whole we know that they carried the O-Wakazashi to blend in. The myth may come from the fact that they would have used lower quality swords to not risk taking any family heirloom on a mission. After a conversation with Dr Steven Turnbull, he assured me that the archetypal *Sword of Japan* is often thought of

as being the most well-made, but what we all too often fail to consider is that even in the feudal times of Japan you could pick up a lower quality sword, in fact they were made in the thousands. It was common for most people to have a lower quality sword. Thus, the issue of a Ninja owning a low quality sword, this would be so it was ready to be thrown away. Not because they made them that way, but because they needed to fit in with society. Imagine being dressed as a traveller with a top notch weapon. It's like a beggar on the street having a tailored suit on.

In summary, we know that the Ninja carried a sword, we know he would be deadly with it, he would carry it openly and he used it as a tool to climb and to break and enter and to fight with. Did he have a straight-bladed purpose-made weapon? Probably not. Was he deadly with 50 cm of steel in his hand?…A resounding yes!

The Shuriken or 'Throwing Star' as it is better known is fixed within the iconic image of the Ninja. As discussed, the Shuriken is not a 'Ninja weapon' per se. We must be clear on this, there is no evidence for

Shuriken as an umbrella term being an invention of the Ninja. This is a vast misconception. However, that does NOT mean that Ninjas did not use the Shuriken. Be clear on this next fact, there is no evidence for the Ninja inventing or being the only users of Shuriken! But what we can be logically sure of is that Ninjas would have used them. So why add them here if this is an investigation into the Ninja? The Shuriken has been inserted here because people not only have the misconception about the relationship between the Shuriken and the Ninja but also have a great misconception about the Shuriken themselves.

ETYMOLOGY

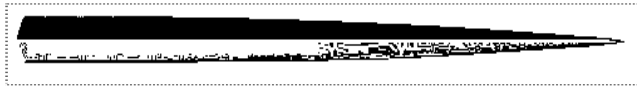
The word Shuriken can be translated as 'blade hidden inside the palm or hand' and can also be read as *Te-no-ura.* However we can find 5 other examples of Chinese ideograms that can be read as *Shuriken*. The word Shuriken may have been the most used but there are other examples of words used for Shuriken that could have been used in its place. Further to this you will sometimes hear the words Shuriken-Jutsu. This simply means 'the art of throwing a hidden blade from the palm or hand'.

TYPOLOGY

If you ask an Englishman what shape a Shuriken is they will most likely say 'star-shaped', if you ask a

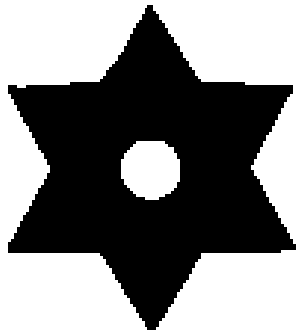
Japanese martial artist he may say ‘like a dart’. So why the difference? Well, the Shuriken can be broken up into a massive amount of variations however there is no room here and thus, we can break it down into two major forms.

BO-SHURIKEN



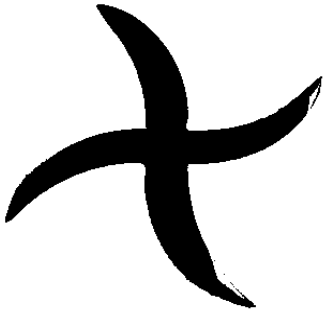
Bo Shuriken are straight bladed Shuriken that come in different forms and cross-sections. They are generally not flat but three dimensional.

SHA-SHURIKEN

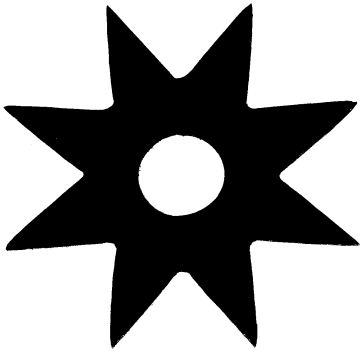


Sha-Shuriken are ‘Wheel Shuriken’ and are what we as westerners class as the iconic Shuriken when we use the name. These are generally flat spinning plates.

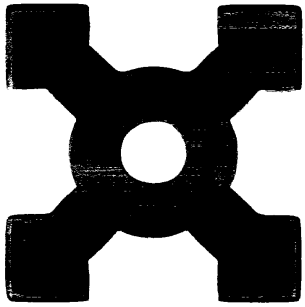
OTHER EXAMPLES OF SHA-SHURIKEN



MANJIGATA SHURIKEN



A FORM OF HAPPOGATA



JUJI SHURIKEN

WHO USED THEM?

Samurai martial arts schools often place Shuriken as part of their curriculum for use alongside other arts such as Kenjutsu. There is nothing to say that they are not or were not secret weapons and each school kept them under wraps but the point is that samurai schools also had Shuriken –Jutsu as one of their skills and thus they are not a 'Ninja weapon'. . .

ACCURACY

Did you know that a Ninja can extinguish a candle flame with a thrown shuriken? Well that's the urban myth anyway! But what is the reality of the ability of the Ninja when using this weapon? There is no way to tell how good the Ninja were with these thrown weapons and that is because there are too many variables. What we can say is that some would have been good, some would have been okay and some would have been outstanding. This is based on general ability across the human species. What we can say is that someone who practices with them relentlessly will become good, a good thrower would become expert and then there are those who would be so natural that they became throwing masters. How do we know this? Easy, look at the skills of the professional knife-throwers of today. You can find vast examples of highly skilled blade-throwers in every country – simply add this skill to the historical setting of the Shinobi.

EFFECTS AND DAMAGE

Before you think about the damage that a Shuriken could do you must first understand the difference between historical and modern types of Shuriken. Do not fall into the trap of imagining the modern Shuriken as the same as its ancestor. These cheap and lightweight blades are in no way a comparison to the heavy iron blades of the past. You must imagine thickset and heavy duty blades which are larger than the new versions. Now ask yourself if you would like a 6 to 10 inch blade through your neck, in your stomach, through your foot or even through your eye and into your brain? You only have to see a blade-thrower of today launch knives with accuracy into wood to understand what that would be like when hitting the soft parts of your body. Most people have played down the damage of a Shuriken and call them distraction weapons. If a nail in your eye or stomach is only distracting I applaud you!

IN REALITY

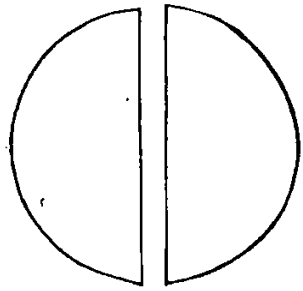
So, we know that the Ninja did not invent the weapon and we know that the Shuriken was used by many people but that means that the Ninja probably would have used them, as they would have made good shock weapons. Maybe we can envisage the situation where an expert blade-thrower is part of the Ninja ambush team set up in the woods to stop other Ninjas infiltrating their lord's camp. A man runs past but does not have the password, with a flick of the wrist

the blade-throwing Shinobi sends a shuriken into the face of the enemy and the other Shinobi cut him down? This would be as close to the reality of the Ninja as we may get.

Chapter 3
Tools of the Ninja

Did a Ninja disappear in a cloud of smoke? Could they throw handmade grenades around a corner and shock a group of Samurai? Do these iconic images have any reflection in the shadows of history? Well, not only do these popular images of the Shinobi have reality within these shadows, they are actually *more* solid than a castle wall! One can divide the Ninjas use of fire into two main areas, flames used for torches, arson and infiltration, and 'fire' used as an explosive. Fire-power as used in projectile weapons will not be discussed in this section.

GRENADE!!!



[1]

Yes the Ninja not only knew about black powder but they had hand grenades, land mines and 'nail bombs'. The Gunpo manual which holds three scrolls based on the Ninja states the following:

'This [grenade] is used on a night attack by throwing it where many enemies are gathering in order to create a commotion among them.'

(1615)

The slick image of some Samurai hanging around on watch, waiting by the fire for the cold to pass, suddenly thrown over by a Shinobi grenade and to be cut down by an attacking force is an image that is put forward by modern media and is one of the only factors of the Ninja that a modern audience has not got wrong. If this is not enough we also have the other image of the Ninja escaping into the night in a

[1] Image taken from the 1615 Gunpo manual

puff of smoke, and to help us see if this is true we have the following quote from the same source as above:

'it [the grenade] should be made of clay and as thin as unglazed earthenware. Put strong gunpowder and iron filings, fine sand and so on and then place the mixture between the two pieces. You use it by throwing it where the enemies are gathering. Also it is good in the case that you need to flee very quickly from a Shinobi mission.'

(1615)

Where there is fire, there is smoke and thus there would be a Ninja escaping within its cloud.

Further to this amazing fact we see that the Shinobi had a form of landmine that once tread upon exploded and damaged the area and people around, made from thin bamboo, straw mats and packed with gunpowder, this incredible weapon shows us that the Ninja were extremely expert explosive technicians and that they were possibly at the forefront of the firework industry.

FIRE, FIRE, FIRE!!!

How would a Ninja use fire? Most people consider the Ninja to stand in front of flames making mystical hand signs and showing an esoteric silhouette. Of course any real enthusiast would have a different idea but what does history tell us about these architects of the flame? A Ninja would use fire for the following reasons:

- For arson
- For warmth
- For signalling
- For infiltration

ARSON

It was important, as the scrolls tell us, that a Ninja should know the time so that he and his squad would be able to set fire to a camp or castle at the same instant. It appears that setting fires and arson were a fundamental aspect of the Ninjas way of life.

WARMTH

Although we all think Ninjas have the skin of a rhino and that the simply laugh at the cold, I'm afraid to say, they were human and had human needs and warmth is a big need in the life of a man running around in the woods at night waiting to set fires. We do know that the Shinobi would set fire to the ground

and cover it over to keep warm at night, have fires and watch fires to look out for the enemy. It is said in the Gunpo that a Ninja should always carry embers of ash in a holder so that a fire is never far away. Alongside this we know that the Ninja also had quick-start ignition power so that they could ignite warmth at will.

SIGNALLING

Most of the fire signalling information in the historical texts comes in the form of smoke signals (which mainly tell of using wolf droppings) and rarely in flames themselves. The only main time that fire is used as a signal is that of the thrown fire arrows, which are launched just before an attack, in unison with a war cry and the Ninja descend on the unsuspecting victims!

INFILTRATION

Infiltration is where we possibly find the most references to the use of fire. You would expect the silent Ninja to be covered in shadow and not using fire to infiltrate their ways into enemy territory. However a lot of the historical information dedicated to the flame is used to give information on various types of torches. We find torches that last 12 miles for those long journeys in the mountains, thus if you knew the distance you knew the amount of torches needed. Add to that we find tree bark torches for

those emergency situations, then waterproof torches that will stay lit through rain storms and river crossings. Further to this, and very surprising, is the fact that a Ninja would 'spark up' a small hand held tree bark torch to look into windows and into keyholes! It seems unbelievable to us but it does appear that a Ninja felt safe enough to light up and illuminate the world around them while on what we would consider to be an In-Nin mission, that is to say- infiltration in the dead of night.

Thus, we can now understand that a Ninja would use fire to blow up their enemies through land mines, grenades and nail bombs allowing them to disappear in a puff of smoke or kill enemies in a very modern way. Further to that we can see the Ninja running through the mountains with waterproof torches in hand, looking through key holes and windows or launching burring arrows to signal the all-out attack!

The Ninja scaling a wall, windswept and catlike in their ability, -true or false? Firstly, asking a question such as *–could all Ninjas climb like a cat,* is

completely flawed. That is like asking *'can all people in the British intelligence network speak Russian?'* Otake Sensei of the Katori Ryu and the author of the 1615 Gunpo scrolls tell us that people have differing specializations and that certain sections of the Ninjutsu community did different things. Both of the masters mentioned above talk about climbing and the reality of the Ninjutsu skills. Otake Sensei talks of their climbing in relation to trees and states that they had specialist climbers who could scurry around the treetops like squirrels going about their business. But he also talks about the reality of them needing to use wet lengths of cloth to throw and wrap around branches to get a purchase. The Gunpo goes into much more detail and talks about creating lifting baskets to haul up cliff faces. It states that a group of nimble or agile Ninjas could scale a cliff face and attach the equipment needed to get the lift secure and ready to be used. But keeping our feet on the ground we can see that the Ninjas, like the common window cleaner would simply use a ladder!

To put a small amount of Ninja magic back into our understanding and idea of the Shinobi night infiltrator we should simply look to the Shoninki manual. It states that one of the main tools of the Ninja was in fact the Kaginawa or grappling hook! Both the Gunpo and the Shoninki state that a Ninja should infiltrate a place from the most difficult place. In the Gunpo it talks about the warring period, mentioning infiltration into castles and on steep mountain ridges, and of peace time the Shoninki refers to manor houses and such. Thus, we can certify that a Shinobi did send

aloft his grappling hook, scale castle walls and samurai estates and do all the things that we expect a Ninja to do!

For a realistic understanding of the scope of the Ninja you need look no further than our own world. Look to the experienced free-climbers of today or the native tribes of the developing world and their ability to scale trees in search of foods and fruits. It is here that we can see the reality of the climbing level of the Ninja, a vast mixture of ability, from the fearless to the ground-bound!

SHUKO & ASHUKO
THE NINJA CLAWS

The iconic and now world famous Ninja hand-claws, sold in martial arts shops around the world and instantly recognisable as positively Ninja! But are they real? Would you believe that there appears to be only one museum in Japan that has them listed? The main museum in Iga-Ueno which is the officially recognised Ninja authority does not hold any of these so called Ninja claws. Also, to date there have been no examples of these said claws in any of the Ninjutsu manuals anywhere in academic records. Recognised Ninja researchers have so far never seen them in historical contexts, and no one who is a true martial arts researcher has been able to place them within the archaeological record. So you may ask, where is this museum that holds a pair of these Ninja claws? Well, would you be surprised to know that the only 'historical' sets of these are in *Ninja Land*, and would you believe that the patron of this museum is none other then Dr Masaki Hatsumi! So the only man who claims the only and absolute lineage of Ninjutsu is the patron of the only museum to back up his claims that these claws are real Ninja weapons. Simply put, these weapons came into common discussion with his Ninja school, they are not found in any historical record and only his museum have a pair.

So did these claws exist or not? The answer is we don't know, we can probably venture to say no, they are not historical tools. But just because they are not in the archaeological record does not mean they never existed. For now we are only left yet again with the

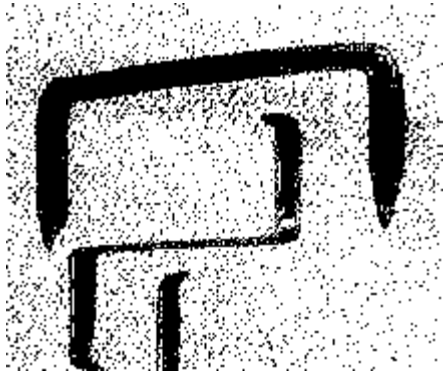
word of Dr Masaki Hatsumi...*If that is something that can be trusted (no blasphemy intended)*.

THE BANSENSHUKAI CLAWS

Those of you who have read the Bansenshukai in the original Japanese will bring up the image of the foot-claws that are without doubt a version of Ashuko. The problem here is that Ashuko are said to be secret Ninja weapons/tools. In the Bansenshukai it says that these foot spikes are for crossing icy passages and are not referenced as climbing tools or as weapons. Further to this they are not named. We have evidence from all over the world that people used spikes on shoes to cross ice. Thus, were Ashuko, secret Ninja weapons? No, a version does appear in the documentation but in all probability they are well known and not specific to climbing or used as tools. Be careful here, it is probable that the Ninja could have used them as weapons, but again that does not make them secret Ninja weapons.

HISTORICAL NINJA CLIMBING TIPS

We do know from the archaeological finds of small tips that the Ninja used, that they would place hair pins and spikes into the gaps within rocks and use them as footholds. They would also use u-shaped metal spike clamps that the Japanese builders of the day used and utilize them as spiked handholds.



BREAKING & ENTERING TOOLS

In the Bansenshukai the author says '*if you use Ninjutsu with the wrong frame of mind you will simply be a thief*'. It is this message that tells us how much of the Ninjas job we do not include in our iconic image of the Shinobi and that is the ability for a Ninja to infiltrate a compound and break into a house. Because even though the concept of thievery within Ninjutsu was only meant to be done on a lord command, thievery still had to be done.

THE GRAPPLING HOOK

The Shoninki tells us that one of the primary tools of the Ninja's arsenal was the grappling hook. This simple tool was the key tool for a Ninja to break and enter.

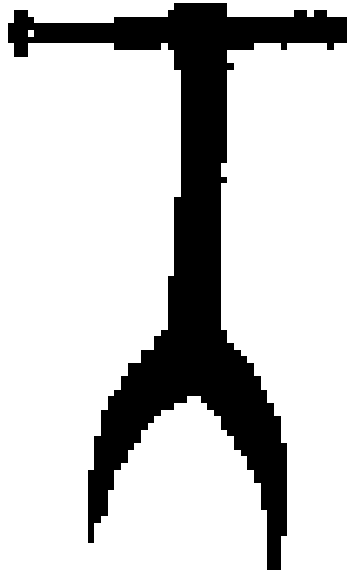
THE SAW

There is a tool called a *Tsuijiyaburi* 築地破り, this tool is for breaking through clay walls. The overall length is 33 cm and 15 -18cm wide. It has a saw edge around the rim. You can use this to break through a wall by cutting while rotating it until you reach the other side. This was used by the Ninja to tear away at the wattle walls and gain entrance into a compound.

Surprisingly the Ninja had a second simpler saw, this was used to open sliding doors or paper screens, you can then cut into the screen and then open it up allowing you to reach inside and open locks.

SCORING DEVICES

There is also another small tool that was used to score through wattle walls and create holes that the Ninja could use to aid them when they were breaking and entering. They would place the tool against the wall and spin it until it began to cut.



SELF PROTECTION

Interestingly there always seems to be a Ninja versus Ninja situation when we talk about the Shinobi. This is no different to the world of thievery. The Shoninki tells of how, if you suspect a Ninja to enter your

house you should double tie all the locks with thread. Then leave one door open so that it would entice the enemy Shinobi to come in that route and you can kill them as they crawl through the window.

CROW BARS

The Ninja had a small style crow bar that was used to take out wood joints and their fixings and also to break open doors and take them off their rails.

THE COLLAPSIBLE SAW

The Ninja had a folding saw. This is a typical Japanese tool and still used in traditional carpentry in Japan.

THIEVES?

So were the Ninja thieves or not? The answer to this question depends on many variables, such as, who is asking the question, of what time period are you talking etc. The original Japanese for Shinobi meant thief and stealing, which was later changed to mean a heart like an iron blade. The author of the Shoninki definitely says that he is not a thief, as to him a thief was called a Nusubito and that they were basically scum. He does say that they were skilled but that they had zero morals, thus were not Ninja and were simply thieves. Further, to this he states that the people in the early Edo period had changed the old word for Ninja – Yato (leader in the Night) into Yato (thief in the Night) thus we can see how the view of the Ninja

changed from spy to thief back and forth, depending on the time and the geographical location and by who was saying it. However, there is no doubt that the Ninja was a form of thief. The archetypal Ninja was an infiltrator that would steal on the command of his superiors or when he needed proof of his mission's success or when he needed to create cash flow to achieve the mission at hand and would never steal for simple monetary profit. How far that idealistic image went in the reality of historical events will never be known. However we can understand that the difference between Ninja and thief was down to the morals of the field agent themselves. As Nakashima Sensei said to me over tea in the mountains… "the line between Ninja and thief is a very thin one that is often crossed".

Have you seen the films with Ninjas holding snakes, milking poison and dipping their shuriken into a vile? Or even dipping darts for blowguns into poison. Also we can take the James Bond image from *You only Live Twice* where the Ninja slides poison down a thread to the 00 agent below. All of these things are

common to the Ninja identity, from the poison tipped blade to the fat lord dying from eating a deadly cake. But what is in fact the reality behind the poisons used by the Ninja, if any?

Firstly, let us say that poison is most definitely included in the Shinobi arsenal and is a factor that is taken seriously by the texts. However, it may not quite be in the style that we expect.

DOGS

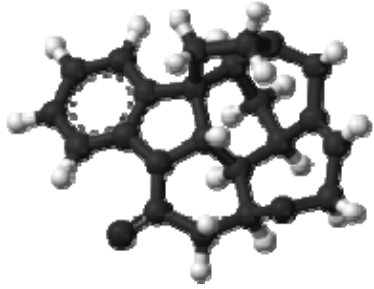
In the manuals dogs are part of the poison story but only from the receiving end of the poison and not always from a poison you would expect. To defeat the humble guard dog, some Ninja were taught how to make iron-filling style food gifts for these 'cuddly creatures' who would gulp them down with glee. Only to find that the iron fillings would rip open their internals and make the dog bleed to death and thus giving the Ninja an opportunity. Further to this they would feed the dog a plant based oil which would radically dehydrate it and leave the animal weak and in need of water and also without the ability to bark, thus giving the Ninja time to enter.

THE MAD HATTER'S TEA PARTY

One of the best examples of poison comes from the Shoninki and involves swapping the poisoned cakes around the dinner table. Remembering that in the day

of the Shoninki the Ninja were a form of secret police, we are given a situation where a Ninja spy is sat at diner with the lord he is to visit and supposedly gain information from. Here we get a glimpse of an amazing image where the lord knows he has a Ninja in his midst and the Ninja knows that the lord knows he is a Ninja! The Shoninki warns that when at such a dinner you must eat only communal food and never taste anything that is served only to you. The same goes for drink, which is mainly communal anyway, but what takes the biscuit and I mean that literally, is the next point… A Ninja who suspects that he is trying to be poisoned by his host should try, if he can to swap the cakes laced with poison that he has been given and somehow have them passed back to the lord or his retinue in secret, so that they choke to death on their own plans.

STRYCHNINE



The poison that the Ninja used during the above example is said to be a poison called Strychnine. The Strychnine tree (Strychnos nux-vomica L.) also

known as nux vomica, is an evergreen tree native to southeast Asia, a member of family *Loganiaceae*. It is from this tree that we presume the Ninja gathered a portion of their poison.

SNAKES

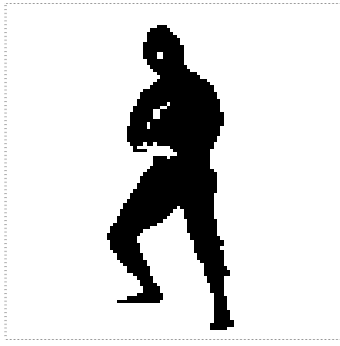
There are tales of the Ninja using snakes tied to ropes, using their poison and generally making use of these deadly creatures. We can find a small amount of evidence from the Koga document Ohara Katsui Monjo about snakes but not enough. However if you look at the fauna of Honshu, the main island in Japan where the men of Iga or the Ninja lived there is one major suspect! The Mamushi is a kind of pit viper (*Agkistrodon blomhoffi*) that can kill a human with its

venom. Now we know from the historical documents that a Ninja would fit into a specialisation and one of those is said to be that of the animal handler. Thus it is possible that the Ninja snake stories have a base of truth set about them. Furthermore there is one more snake on Honshu that is also a suspect and that is the yamakagashi (*Rhabdophis tigrinus*). It has a small mouth and thus cannot attack large prey, however that does not mean a Ninja could not have obtained that poison.

So, are the stories of poison and threads true? I think the reality was somewhere in between the myth and scepticism. Yes poisons were used, maybe even milked from snakes, and they were definitely fed to people. So we can rest in the knowledge that the Ninja were probably herbalists and snake handlers who had a good knowledge of poison and how to kill a person with it!

Chapter 4
The Truth Behind the Ninja Suit

THE NINJA SUIT



A major concept that is misunderstood by the average person in each household across the western world is the idea of an 'off the shelf' Ninja suit, a karate style black suit with gauntlets and a two piece hood. To a non-martial artist this has become the image of the Ninja and has caused massive arguments within the 'Ninjutsu' world, arguments that have become distorted and based on incorrect information. One side argues that the Ninja suit did exist and that the Ninja had a 'get up' for their covert activities, while the other side of the argument is that the Ninja suit is a modern concept that was invented for the media during the Ninja boom of the 20th century and that suit was derived from Japanese theatre assistants. As

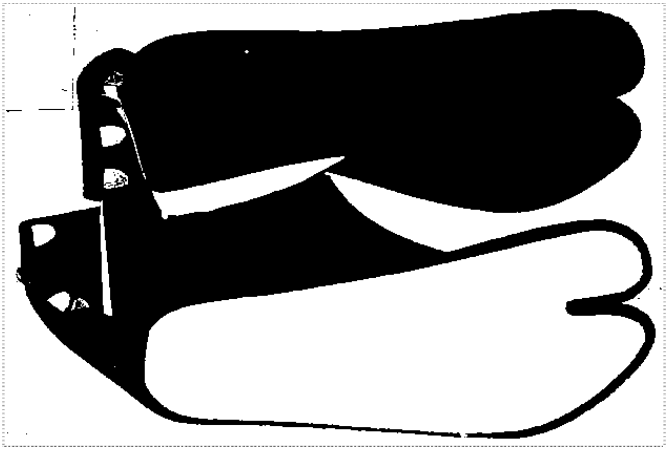
a historian, I cannot say with certainty what the reality was, but I can say that both arguments are illogical and are based on a misguided view of the concept of a suit or need for required equipment. It is clear to see that in essence and quite paradoxically that both are correct and both are wrong. To establish the correct ground to argue this on, we need to see the historical version of the Ninja suit and not the commercial one. To a martial artist or Ninja enthusiast a 'Ninja' is a man clad in black, loose-fitting trousers stretched tight around the calf, straw sandals and split-toe slippers, a kimono jacket, hand gauntlets and face mask. This is the common, more correctly establish version of the Ninja in his covert activity suit. This being said we should now understand what is fundamentally incorrect about the argument itself.

The main problem comes with the difference in common understanding, between a 21st century martial artist and that of a member of the feudal Japanese community. As a modern western person, we see the Ninja suit as exotic and unfamiliar, that is, it would be uncharacteristic to see one walking down the road. However, if you were in feudal Japan what parts of the Ninja suit would be out of place in the world you live in? If we can remove the common elements from our understanding of the Ninja costume, we can see what was unique about it.

SANDALS

Straw sandals are or were a common feature in medieval Japan, you can still buy these on market stalls today as a historical curiosity. Thus, would a Ninja wear them? Yes of course, these are a basic form of footwear.

TABI OR SPLIT-TOED SOCKS



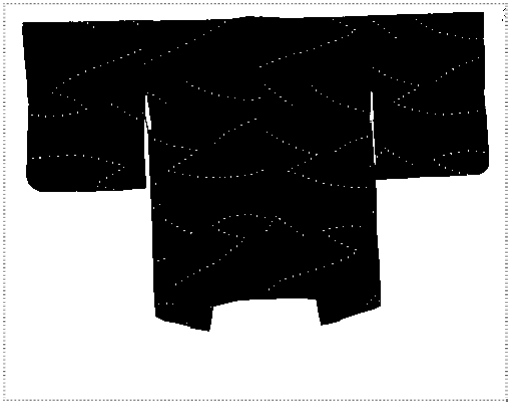
As above, Tabi are still used in Japan and were universal footwear used in the past.

IGA-BAKAMA

LOOSE-FITTING TROUSERS WHICH ARE STRETCHED TIGHT AROUND THE CALF

There are many forms of dress in medieval Japan, but one of them was the Iga-Bakama. As described, they are basically, Hakama, or formal trousers with the exception that they are closed tight on the lower half of the leg. These trousers where used by farmers, travellers, workers etc. They were light and had a freedom of movement, making it easy to get around as appose to full Hakama.

JACKET



We are all familiar with the Uwagi 上衣 jacket of Japanese tradition. Even though there are many versions and it is a science within itself, the principle is that a jacket wraps around the body leaving the iconic V shape, well-used and well understood on the streets of Japan.

GAUNTLETS OR TEKKO

These items are an unbelievable icon of the Ninja suit, that is, to a non-Japanese audience. These gauntlets were and are used across Japan, they are a basic piece of equipment for people working in the fields or travelling. These Tekko are still on sale all over Japan.

This only leaves the Ninja mask, or Sanjaku Tenugui, even this is not unfamiliar in Japanese society. However, Natori Masazumi, a 17th century Ninja,

tells us that a Ninja, when doing covert operations should wear this mask or face cloth to hide who he is. He also states that you may need to use ink to darken your face. He also states that the colour of your clothes should be black, brown, navy blue, or a mix of red and black called suhozome. He states that the reason for this is not to do with stealth at night, as most people think, but as they are the most common colours and you will not be suspect by wearing them.

It can now be seen that, the Ninja did not have a special suit to wear on operations but what they did have was set of clothes that allowed them to be discreet and with the addition of this face mask could quickly become disguised and ready for a stealth mission. Thus, the argument is that the Ninja did not have a suit to wear but did the Ninja look like the ideal that we have? Yes they did, *to us* theirs was a Ninja suit, a Ninja did look like we thought he did, climbing castle walls at night dressed in that now so iconic image. To a medieval Japanese person, there was a person wearing non-descript clothes and a face mask climbing up a wall and running through trees. Both are the same image but mean different things to each set of people. In the end all we need to truly get from the argument is that the image did not come from Japanese theatre and the Ninja did wear this iconic get-up, but on the other hand this get-up is not as specialised as we thought, as it was a common outfit.

For the more romantic of us, it is nice to know that, once in a far away land, a long time ago, there was a

moon, a castle and a Ninja, just how we wished they were. Feel at ease knowing your childhood dreams are not shattered, and that a Ninja, might just be out there.

Going around the Ninja enthusiast community, there are a few theories of what colour the 'Ninja Suit' is, they are as follows.

1. A 'Ninja Suit' is black
2. A 'Ninja Suit' is dark red
3. A 'Ninja Suit' is white in the snow
4. A 'Ninja Suit' is double sided
5. There is no such thing as a Ninja suit

Remembering that the reality of a Ninja suit was discussed earlier and keeping that lesson in mind we will exchange the term 'Ninja Suit' for 'stealing-in attire' to represent the clothes that they would wear during a bout of In-Nin, that is infiltration methods.

INFORMATION FROM THE SHONINKI BY MASAZUMI NATORI

Because the stealing-in attire of a Shinobi was basically the common clothes of the day with the addition of the mask, the Shoninki states that it should be one of four colours.

1. Black
2. Brown
3. Dark blue
4. A mix of dark red & brown

He then goes on to say that these colours are common in Japan and that wearing them will simply make you blend in with the crowd. He means that you will not be found out of place if someone stumbles up on while you are spying, there is no mention of them being better at night.

The problem we have to highlight is that the Shoninki was written in 1681 and this was 80 years after the Tokugawa takeover and well into the era of peace. The needs of the Shinobi and their role changed during this social and political changeover. The Ninja of the Shoninki period was more akin to the secret police and their Ninjutsu was mainly Yo-Nin, which is the art of staying in plain sight while spying.

INFORMATION FROM THE GUNPO

The Gunpo has two major points that deal with the colour of the Shinobi's stealing-in attire. The first is in the point that a Shinobi should wear *fur* garments as they spend a large portion of their time in the mountains, woods and sleeping under the stars. Through this we can see that the modern Japanese image of the Ninja, with his fur waistcoat is possibly more correct then the black clad Ninja at night.

The second statement in the Gunpo is that during the full-moon a Ninja should wear all white and during no moon the Ninja operative should wear black. This came with no explanation, however, upon talking to Nakashima Sensei it is evident from his research that in an environment where artificial light is non-existent and when the moon is full, there is a white glow that surrounds the landscape. Thus, a Ninja wearing white who is in hiding would not show up as easily because wearing white would allow them to blend in with the moon's highlights. To wear black in this situation would simple create a hole in the white blanket of light. Vice versa, when there is no moon in a purely light-free place then you have total or partial blackness and to wear black would render you as almost invisible.

The Gunpo was first written in 1615 and was a form of collective information from the experiences of the warring time. Remembering that the use and role of a Shinobi was completely different during the warring

period we know that they did more of the In-nin activities. That is the classic infiltration sequences we see in films. This is where we see the iconic Ninja step up, here we have the Ninja creeping into castles, stealing from houses and generally being a Ninja in the modern understanding.

THE QUESTION REMAINS!

What colour was a 'Ninja suit'? Well we can now say, through this research that the colour of the 'Ninja suit' changed depending on the period, activity and phase of the moon!

The 'rules of colour' for the attire a Shinobi should wear when stealing-in are as follows:

1. During the full-moon – **white**
2. On a moonless night – **Black**
3. At other times when you have to blend in with the crowd – **brown, black, blue or dark red.**
4. when crossing the mountains or hiding in the wilderness – **Fur**

Remember, a 'Ninja suit' is simply Japanese common streetwear until you put a face mask on (or over your head) and wearing the 'get-up' does not make someone a Ninja, training in Ninjutsu is the fundamental element, not the 'costume'.

Chapter 5
Escape Methods

There is one myth that Ninjas could dislocate all their joints and escape from any restraint by popping their joints in and out. From the start we must establish that it has been difficult to find any evidence for the ability to dislocate and relocate the joints of the human body. From the Shinobi to Harry Houdini there are only hints of this fabled ability but no proof as such. So from the start it is inconclusive if the Ninja could actually perform this feat. With escapologists keeping their secrets close and no apparent historical evidence from the manuscripts, this iconic image of the Ninja is a difficult one to break. Thus, we have to look at what we do know about actual historical information on the topic of how Ninjas used to get out of sticky situations.

ESCAPE TECHNIQUES THAT WE CAN SUBSTANTIATE

The following list can substantiate, confirmed by dates and from historical evidence, the main forms of escape that a Ninja had the ability to enact.

THE CLOUD OF SMOKE

The iconic image is that of a Ninja escaping in a cloud of smoke. As discussed before, the hand grenade and explosion is historical fact so we know that the boom of a bomb and the escaping Ninja was a definite in their repertoire.

THROWING STONES

The Shoninki tells us the trick of throwing a pebble down the opposite side of a roof when a Ninja has been spotted! That way the guards will follow the sound, thinking it as falling masonry disturbed during your escape. In reality you are on the other side and are away!

STEALING A TORCH

Interestingly, the Shinobi manuals of the Gunpo tell how you should keep your handheld torch away from the grasp of a prisoner as often they grab the torch and burn the guard to make good their escape!

COPYING THE INSECTS' VOICE

The Ninjutsu oral traditions tell of how, when you have a Ninja for a prisoner you should listen out for animal noises. They say that Ninja communicate by mimicking the sound of insects and birds to hatch a plan of escape. Thus, if you have a Ninja in custody

and you hear these sounds you know that a Ninja is talking to an ally and planning his escape!

PUTTING OUT THE LIGHT

It appears that one version of escape was to extinguish the guards' light and use the darkness to escape. This evidence comes up with a special torch invented by the Ninja so that it will not go out in wind or when a prisoner tries to put out the flame.

ESCAPING BONDS

There is one compelling piece of evidence that points to the possibility of the art of escapology in Ninjutsu. The Gunpo says the following:

If you capture prisoners, be sure not to let your guard down. It is often the case that they would remove the neck brace or slip their bonds

In Asia a type of wooden neck brace was used and a series of complex knots. The manual also says how you should not leave a prisoner alone, so that they will not have a chance to make their escape. This is the closest evidence that we have to the iconic body-popping Ninja!

TAKE THE OPPONENT'S WEAPON

When approaching a prisoner you must not take a weapon with you but guard in numbers, as stealing

the guard's weapon seems to be a trick used. Something you must know is that to tie a Samurai with bonds and rope was impolite, thus you could have unbound warriors in a room as a prisoner, so do not take a weapon in there!

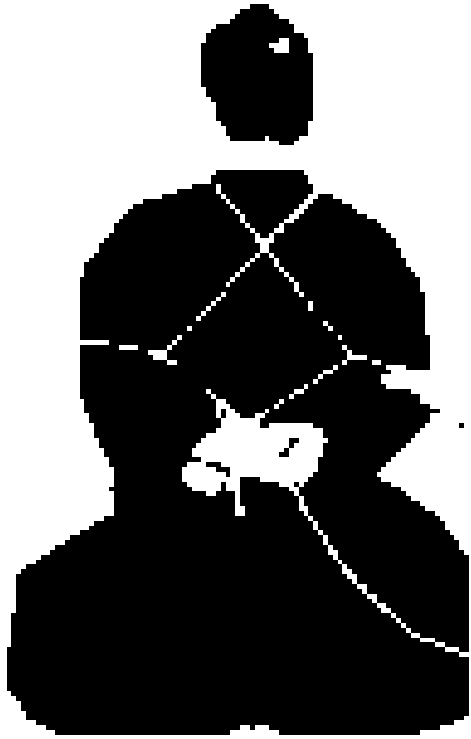
SAMURAI SUICIDE

Remembering that a samurai could be a Ninja or use Ninjutsu we also have to consider that suicide was an option. The manuals tell us that a samurai should be kept in a cage or palanquin small enough to stop them from committing suicide.

THE ESCAPE ROUTE

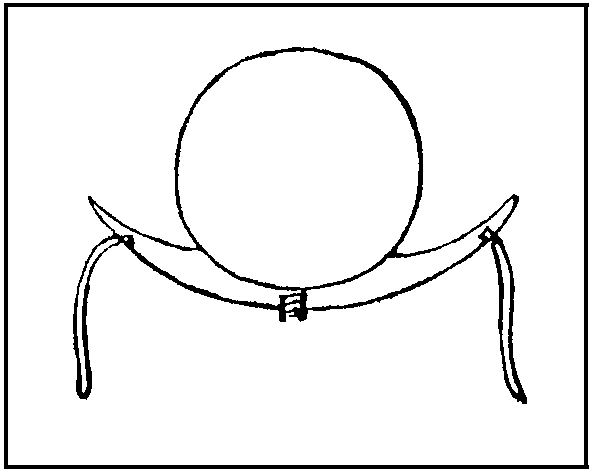
One thing that comes up time and time again in the historical manuals is the concept of escape route. The best way to escape is to not be captured!!! That was the real Ninja ethos. A Ninja was taught to plan and plan again, and again his way out. If you know the way in, you had better know your way out, that is what the real escape trick of the Ninja was.

HOJOJUTSU
THE JAPANESE ART OF TYING UP A PRISONER (ACCORDING TO RANK)



In the manuals it shows how a Ninja was taught (hojojutsu) knots and rope techniques to tie up an enemy with certainty. Just the simple existence of these sophisticated knots shows how conscious a custodian would have been of some prisoner's ability

to escape. Thus, heavy measures would be taken to restrain a prisoner. Even to the point of using a captive to lead you on a night attack with the promise of life and gold!



The above image is a mouth gag from the Gunpo which was used to stop a prisoner shouting out and warning his friends about the attack. Alongside this he would be bound with knots and be retrained with sticks tied to his sides to stop him bending down whilst also having his feet bound, allowing for small movements.

In conclusion, we can take it that the Ninja did have differing degrees of escape tricks but apart from the historically attested ones, we cannot be sure what their levels of skill were. However, logically we can say that each Ninja had a differing level of ability and that some may have been the Harry Houdinis of the

time and others who were done for if the enemy even got a whiff of them!

Chapter 6
Infiltration Methods

What is the difference between a 16th and 17th century Ninja? No this is not the start of a really bad martial arts joke, it is a question that requires a lengthy answer. First we have to do understand what the difference in the Japanese way of life between the 16th and 17th centuries actually was. If you were a Ninja in the 1500s you would be in the middle of the warring period. That was when Japan was separated into warring factions and at the head of each faction was the leading warlord. Grouped in to basic conglomerates the warlords would fight back and forth for power, sending army against army, turning on each other and generally keeping the country in a state of constant war. Now, if you were a Ninja after 1603 and especially if you were alive later in the century you would enjoy the 'harmony' of living in the Tokugawa era or as we now know it, the Edo-period. That is when that mighty old warlord, Lord Tokugawa went back on his word of protecting the next boy ruler and basically took all of Japan for himself. Now after things settled down, the country was held in totalitarianism and under the iron fist of

the Tokugawa it was brought into an era of peace. So, what is the difference between a 16th & 17th century Ninja?

THE 16TH CENTURY NINJA

When looking at the job of a Ninja we now understand that it was as an infiltrator or spy. Thus, what were the methods of a Ninja in the 16th century? Firstly we know that the Shinobi were normally assigned or could be distributed among the army. We know from the Gunpo scroll that the average size of a Ninja detachment within an army of 4000 was around 20. Now how did these Ninja work within the force? Their job was quite specific and involved infiltration, guiding and guard duties.

INFILTRATION

This type of infiltration is not what we would class as the stereotype and consisted of the Ninja moving among the mountains, which could be enemy territory, mapping pathways, spying on enemy positions and planning out routes for a moving army. Also, this is where our iconic image of the Ninja springs to the front. It was here in the warring times that we find the Ninja, dressed for stealth and climbing cliff faces and leaping from roof to roof as he finds a window into a castle. Bring on the iconic or golden times of the Ninja!

GUIDING

One of the original words for the Shinobi was the word Yato which translates as *Night leader*. It was the job of the Shinobi, once they had planned their routes, to take the samurai through the mountains and enemy territory and prepare them for the night raids. These leaders in the night would have a network of ambush Ninja set up which passwords and markings and take the valiant samurai through the forests and trees to face death. Then, whist also joining in the fighting, they would lead and guide the retreating Samurai back to home territory where the ambush Ninja would be waiting. Furthermore, woe betide any Ninja who left his samurai follower behind.

GUARD DUTIES

Surprisingly, one of the main jobs of a Ninja was to be the humble guard. However, we see the guard as a humble and low position now, but was it back then? The safety of all rested upon the ability of the guards. The Ninja had a complex series of techniques for carrying out their guard duties and it is with a small amount of pride that they held themselves above others in this ability. They required a stoic attitude and an acute discipline when taking the mantle of the guard!

THE 17TH CENTURY NINJA

This relatively short period of time brings about vast changes in the way of the Ninja and sees the golden age of the Shinobi start to decline and transform into a form of secret police instead of a set of infiltration scouts. We can see that from strategists and information gathers in times of war they move to the realm of spies in a traditional sense and from an intelligence network

INFILTRATION

Infiltration changes in this period, Tokugawa smashes down his enemies castles and destroys all the glorious cliff top fortresses that threaten him. With these out of the way there is no need for the Ninja to leap the roofs and find himself set against the moonlight! The Ninja then finds his infiltration skills turned against the smaller houses of the samurai when the needs of the person hiring them. The Shoninki manual goes into detail about the methods for getting into a house and residence and or placing spies within the households you need information from. Most of the infiltration is geared towards gaining information and is not the needs of the iconic Ninja, that is setting fires and causing havoc before a war.

GUIDING

The Ninjas who once had the name Yato or Night Leader now have a new name and that is also Yato, to

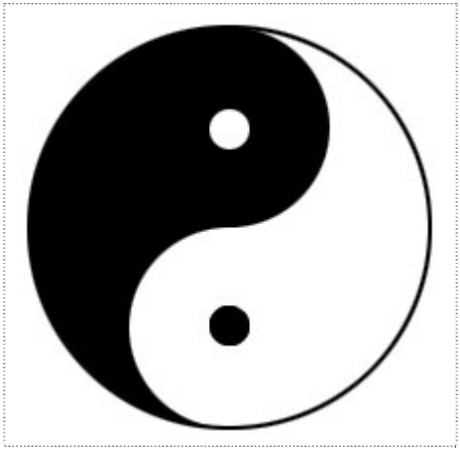
us that may sound the same but when you write them down, the Japanese for this version of Yato now means *Night Thief*. This is a direct consequence of the change in mission statements for the Ninja. They are no longer needed to lead the way in the night and are no longer needed to do much or any guiding, thus they drop that reputation and skill and are tarred with the brush of thief.

GUARD DUTIES

If you have ever been to Tokyo then you will have been to the imperial palace, and if you have been to the imperial palace you have seen the white and wood gates on most of the cardinal directions. Well if you know their names you will realise that one of them is called Hanzomon and is now the name of a town in Tokyo. *Mon* in Japanese is *gate*, thus Hanozmon is the gate of Hanzo. For those of you who do not know who Hattori Hanzo was, he was the historical figure well-known within martial arts as the man who controlled the Iga Ninja during the shogunate. Those Ninja who guarded the castle resided at Hanzo's gate and took up the guise of gardeners within the castle grounds.

So, what is the difference between both of these Ninjas and the periods they came from? Well, now we can see the vast differences in their skills and requirements, and their image. From the robust castle climbing arsonist to the sly Gestapo-type *eyes and ears* at every corner. That is what the difference is

and that is how they differed in approach to infiltration. The change in the social setting spelled the end of the Ninja but they took a couple of hundred years to die out and leave us as only shadows in the pages of history.



Yin is the ‘negative’ or ‘dark’ element within eastern philosophy and represents the opposing force of light within the natural world. In Japanese this Yin-Yang is termed In-Yo and thus here we will call Yin, *In*. Thus, In-Nin means the ‘Dark’ side of Ninjutsu, but what does this mean to the western reader? Let us consider this dark side with all we have learnt about

the Ninja. If you spoke to a Ninja in feudal times and said the word *In-Nin* they would understand the word to mean night-time infiltration. Therefore, technically, In-Nin is the most famous element of Ninjutsu as it represents the Ninja moving through the night-time and climbing castle walls while spying on those they target, yet the word In-Nin is almost unheard of in the martial arts community.

A Definition

In-Nin in its definition is the art of infiltrating or spying whilst under the cover of darkness without being in open disguise and trying to hide your form from the eyes of others. That does not mean that the Ninja may not adopt a disguise if he is caught, but it does mean that he sets out on a mission with the intention of not walking openly in public.

Techniques

There are various ways to infiltrate a camp or castle or certain things that you should look out for when you, as a Ninja are climbing those high castle walls!

The Impenetrable Approach

A Japanese warring period castle was normally set on the high ground and like castles all over the world it made good use of the natural fortifications that can be found in an area. Thus, a Ninja was told to scale that impenetrable angle, an angle that was normally not guarded, and they were told that was the way for

them to get in. This confirms the iconic image of the Ninja scaling a cliff face, sword and equipment attached as he made his way into the lion's den. The Gunpo scroll talks about leaving powder and spikes around these areas as the Ninja often come that way. At the same point the scroll says how Ninjas, when they steal-into castles like to hide behind things in the dark, thus you should check behind all buildings. Alongside this we have a glimpse of an alternative to this iconic image, and remembering what we have said before about the Ninja suit being normal Japanese wear, we are told that if the castle is large – *get in from the most impregnable area*. However, if the castle is small –*get in from a busy area,* so that once you are in you can blend straight in with the crowd (that must take serious balls!).

TESTING THE GUARDS

You must remember that the guards at a warring period castle are more than likely Ninjas themselves, or at least they have Shinobi within the group and make no mistake it is these Shinobi that are the dangerous ones, as they know all the tricks and are old hat at catching other Shinobi. Firstly, guarding Shinobi are trained in the skill of Kamaritsuke – that means '*Detection Skills of the Ninja*' and they would follow after the guard and check everything and everywhere, like a Shinobi deterrent they would circle the castle or camp waiting to find the Ninjas in hiding. To add to this you had guards who were possibly Ninja and they were called Tokiki and this means *listening scouts*. These scouts would go out

into the night and listen for other Shinobi who were approaching, their job was to hide and listen and wait, wait for that footstep in the dark!

Therefore, when a Ninja found his way to a castle or camp he would create a sound, and unbelievably he may have done it with a musical instrument such as a drum (this is what the scrolls say!) and if those in the guard house did not react or made a large ruckus in reaction to the noise, he would know that they were untrained in the arts of the Ninja. However, if when he made this sound, the guards in the castle or camp went silent and if then 3 or 4 men came out of the guardhouse with spears and swords *'under their arms'* then the attacking Ninja would know that it was impossible to infiltrate that castle. Other skills include placing umbrellas at the doorways to guardhouse and then using the distraction of the guards' responses to gain entry. From scarecrows to mice a Ninja would use anything to create misdirection in the enemy and find a way in under the cover of darkness.

MASS NINJA INFILTRATION

If there is anything more impressive then a lone Ninja in the night, it is loads of Ninjas in the night! What many people do not know is that lots of Ninja activity took place in the mountains and trees between two encamped armies and they protected the paths to and from the main camp. One method of infiltration that sticks out is the art of putting about 70 Ninjas (or warriors) into the opposition's army without them

knowing and in the middle of an attack at night! The aim was to have about 100 Ninja in waiting and when the enemy made their attack and ambush in the night (which they did *en mass*) about 70 of the Ninja would join the attacking force and return with the enemy and act as part of the army, once there they would create havoc and kill as many people as possible or perform other operations such as sabotage. You may ask *–what do the other 30 Ninjas do?* Well, they are designated as 'Ambush Shinobi' and they have passwords and signs set up with the other 70 Ninjas for their return. They wait to see if the enemy try the same trick and kill anyone who does not know the passwords. Just picture the havoc and struggle that must have gone on in the cold Japanese forests at night, under the moon with those Ninjas creeping into each others' armies.

The point to this is that the classic vision that we have of the Shinobi is correct but it is only a fraction of the reality and only a pale understanding of the amazing skills that the Ninja held. This is the true way of the Ninja in the night and the skill of In-Nin, the 'Dark' Ninjutsu.

Yang from the Yin-Yang is the ‘positive’ or ‘light’ side of eastern philosophy. As In-Nin was ‘Dark-Ninjutsu’ then Yo-Nin is the subject of ‘Light-Ninjutsu’. Again, this means little to us but the question is what did Yo-Nin mean to a Ninja of the medieval period? As ‘Dark Ninjutsu’ meant creeping into a castle and camp at night then the art of ‘Light Ninjutsu’ or Yo-Nin was to infiltrate an enemy province using the arts of disguise and to walk openly in public under the guise of a deferent persona.

A Definition

The art of Yo-Nin is in essence the concept of taking on the identity of one profession and becoming a different person with the aim of being able to walk freely around and collect the information that you need. There were 7 main disguises used by the Ninja and they were written down in the Shoninki and are copied below

1. *Komusō Zen monks*: the ability to wear the straw *Amigasa* hat in this outfit which as mentioned before gave good visibility while hiding one's face.
2. *Shukke monks*: this was an easy approach for both men and women to use.
3. *Yamabushi* mountain priests: this was an easy approach for both men and women to use and they could carry a Wakizashi short-sword without being questioned.
4. A Merchant: made it easy to approach people.
5. *Hōkashi street entertainers*: This made it easy to approach people as they commonly performed street entertainment and people were used to them travelling.
6. *Sarugaku performers*: As a form of theatre people will not question why they were there.
7. *Tune no katachi or street clothes*: One should dress in accordance to the type of person one wishes to emulate, this will be

found in the streets that one wishes to travel by.

A YAMABUSHI [2]

Using one of these disguises a Ninja would move from province to province gathering the information that he needs and would adopt not only the persona but also their psychological profile.

[2] This image is also associated with warrior monks

THE TECHNIQUES

There were certain ways that a Ninja would use the art of Yo-Nin, however it must be stated that Yo-Nin seems to have been more important in the post warring period manuals then the warring period ones. That does not mean that it was not valuable, however due to the lack of war, it may have been more important for the secret police style Ninja of the Edo period to know the following skills.

DAKKO

Dakko is the skill of understanding the customs and dialects of as many provinces as possible so that you may be able to emulate accents and information for reasons needed and thus gain the trust of others around you.

USE OF TEMPLES AND SHRINES

It appears that priests were the information transmitters of old Japan and their temples the centres of information. A Ninja was taught to promise the priests gold and riches and play to their egos in exchange for information.

BE THE SERVANT

Another skill of Yo-Nin was to pretend to be a servant of an ambassador and follow a diplomat into

an enemy camp. Then when there, they would feign illness and wait around the camp until they had recovered. The ambassador would go about his business and the Ninja would gather as much information about the enemy force and be more or less ignored as someone of little importance.

INFILTRATING THE ENEMY CAMP IN THE LIGHT OF DAY

The Shoninki tells us that a Ninja should dress as a low level warrior or someone who will not look out of place. Then it is up to the Shinobi to walk around the camp and find out all he can about the enemy's strength. It also tells us that in Yo-Nin you should not try to get information from high ranking people as you will be discovered and that you should make friends with the low level people. That way you will get many small secrets that will reveal the overall plan of the enemy commander.

So the skill of Yo-Nin was the opposite side of infiltration but possibly took up much more of a Ninja's time. Of course it is possible that some Ninja concentrated on Yo-Nin while another Ninja specialised in In-Nin. There is no evidence for this but it is a possibility. However, no matter which way the Shinobi trained and in what ratios, we know that in the masses of crowds in Japan, somewhere in all those people there were Shinobi, walking in and around, waiting and collecting. Who was that Ninja,

what did he look like? No one would know, we have to remember…loose lips sink ships.

The golden subject in terms of Ninjutsu is the concept of the Ninja as an assassin. This is one of the hardest concepts to understand in terms of a historical investigation. The image of the Ninja is set in terms of the Ninja as an assassin. So, firstly we must look at the historical evidence and we have to ask – Did the Ninja ever perform assassination? The answer to this question is simple and it is yes. The real question is not *did Ninjas assassinate people* the real question is, *were Ninjas trained to assassinate?* In all the historical evidence the Ninja manuals normally describe in detail the methods of how to do or how to use Ninjutsu skills. For example, the manuals explain how to build grenades, landmines or teach you how to break into a house, this is all done in detail. However, in the manuals available to us there is no mention of how to assassinate someone and it is not mentioned as a specific skill or requirement of a Ninja. To some this may seem like a useless argument but it is quite

fundamental to the image of the Ninja. Assassination is an ancient method of killing a political rival and of course assassins exist who are not Ninja and they exist all over the world. So what is the difference between a Ninja and an assassin? Or is a Ninja an assassin? A difficult question to answer, to start with we need to look at the meaning of the word assassin to make sure we have the picture correct.

THE MEANING OF THE WORD ASSASSINATE:

To kill suddenly or secretively, especially a politically or prominent person; to murder premeditatedly and treacherously.

This means that any purposeful or pre-planned murder of a specific person is an assassination. Thus anyone can be an assassin, all one has to do is be able to kill and then you are an assassin. However not everybody could be Ninja, to be a Ninja you had to have a specific set of skills.

WHAT DO THE NINJA MANUALS SAY ABOUT ASSASSINATION?

In the Bansenshukai it references assassination but not to the level one would expect it to, if it was a fundamental skill attributed to the Ninja. Of all the books in the Bansenshukai there are only two major references to assassination in its true form.

'…it should be the case that you kill an enemy's general with the skill of Ninjutsu. The benefit it brings about is tremendous. The secrets of Ninjutsu hold the skill where one must kill the enemy's lord. If you can kill the enemy's lord, it will be extremely beneficial as it will make them surrender without fighting.'

'After you work as a double spy you should set fire to the enemy castle or kill a general on your return journey.'

After that the Bansenshukai talks about a Ninja killing but not in the traditional since of assassination, in that the aim is not the death of a specific person. During the In-Nin (Infiltration) section of the manual it mentions killing several times but this centres on a Ninja who has had to infiltrate a home and who has had to kill a family or household members. It is hard to discern if this was a pre-planned assassination or a killing out of convenience of situation. Therefore, we cannot add this to the assassination skills of the Ninja as killing in a medieval context could be quite a norm. Many people could have killed, even breaking into a house and killing, thus we cannot say that this represents the Ninja as an assassin. It is simply a Ninja who has killed out of need and is not the art of Ninjutsu itself.

HISTORICAL ACCOUNTS

The following are the recorded accounts of assassination or evidence for it that are attributed to the Ninja.

The nightingale floorboard is a floorboard that is set to squeak when it is stood on, alerting the castle inhabitants. While this is a famous invention and is associated with the Ninja it could warn against even general infiltration and not only from a Ninja. However it does appear to be connected wholeheartedly to the Shinobi.

The Shogun was once attacked by a Shinobi called Saizo who infiltrated from under the floorboards. Saizo was speared from above and chased out with a 'flamethrower' by a Ninja acting as a guard.

A Ninja called Hachisuka Tenzo tried to assassinate a political figure and was chased off and had to hide in a pre-dug hole to escape.

There are two cases where Ninjas tried to kill the warlord Oda Nobunaga with sharpshooters.

The Taiheikai manual tells us that a non-Ninja performed a very skilful assassination by sneaking into a bedroom and having moths extinguish the candle flame before stealing a blade and then killing the victim. The chronicle tells us it was a small boy and the Chinese ideograms they use to write 'small child' can be read as Shinobi. Thus, while this is not a

Ninja assassination we can say that the chroniclers of the time understood that the image of the Shinobi was as an assassin.

There is a very famous case where a Ninja waits in a toilet to kill a man named Kenshin. This has to be thrown out due to the doubt about its credibility.

CONCLUSION

Finally, was a Ninja an assassin? Because of the very subtle lines of questioning I will finish this chapter with some very clear and straight forward statements.

- Ninjas have been recorded performing assassinations
- There is minimal to no evidence that assassination was being taught as a skill in Ninjutsu
- Ninjas would have been taught a form of martial arts as they were involved in the warrior caste. Thus killing as a skill would have been part of their martial arts training and not the art of Ninjutsu.
- The skills of Ninjutsu make Shinobi perfect agents to act as assassins.
- Assassination and Ninjutsu are two separate skills but Ninjutsu can be an aid to assassination.

Chapter 7
The Spells and Esoteric Beliefs of the Ninja

What is Kuji? For those who have an interest in the Ninja will know Kuji better as the ‘magical hand positions’, and the image of a Ninja cutting lines in the air whilst incanting an ancient ritual. Kuji is one of the most misunderstood elements of the Ninjutsu world and has been the cause of a lot of speculation about Ninjas being the masters of dark magical arts. Kuji can be separated into two main parts; firstly we will deal with Kuji-kiri or the ‘Nine Magical Cuts’.

Out of the two areas of Kuji, Kuji-kiri or Majustsushi, translated here as ‘pure art adept’ is the most magical and esoteric. In a nutshell (and this subject is by far anything but simple enough for a nutshell) Kuji-kiri is the method of connecting with the matrix of the

universe and ‘enforcing’ or ‘implementing’ your will to gain a desired change. This is executed by a series of steps which are simplified below, for the purpose of explanation ‘empowering’ here means to fill the subject mentioned with natural energy or what one could describe as *chi*. No matter what name you put to it, the basic concept is to empower the subject with divine energy so that you can communicate with the matrix of the universe.

EMPOWERING THE HAND, OBJECTS AND SYMBOLS

After meditation and reflection the right hand must be visualized as having a bright white light emanating from it while holding the hand in the sword posture. The sword posture is done by having the index and middle finger pointing straight out and by having the ring and middle finger touch the thumb, creating a circle. Once you have this and with the white light emanating, you must visualize the Japanese Kanji symbol for power and draw it with the thought process that you are indeed cutting open the fabric of the universe. You must then use a similar method to empower objects such as paper, ink, brushes and anything else you will need for this form of ritual magic. Lastly, you need to empower the symbols that you will be using; those symbols are in the form of Japanese Kanji, as each one has a different meaning.

DRAWING THE GRID

The next step is to draw a grid consisting of 9 lines, 5 are horizontal and 4 are vertical. The drawing of this grid is what has become iconic when Ninja have been portrayed in the media and it is this action which has become ingrained within the Shinobi themselves.

When cutting this grid you are opening up the fabric of space to allow your will to be done, it is the matrix on which you are about to place your empowered symbol and send it into the universe to affect the reality around you.

The lines, in order, are cut and named out aloud in the following manner and starting with a horizontal line from left to right. Sometimes the grid is cut in the air in front of you, sometimes drawn on paper and sometimes drawn with the finger on opposite palm.

DRAWING THE SYMBOL

Now that the fabric of the universe is listening to you and is set up to receive your will it is time to draw the desired symbol upon the grid you have just created. You should draw a symbol that represents an effect you want, for happiness: draw happiness, for power of strength: draw the relevant Kanji. One misconception here is that you draw it once and then send it. This is not the case, the ideal is to draw it and utter the command which is the few Kanji you are using in the spell, or the equivalent Sanskrit mantra that represent it, if you know it of course. You utter them a few times, low-voiced, and at the end of the spell, command it with an affirmative attitude a few times, to anchor it within the matrix.

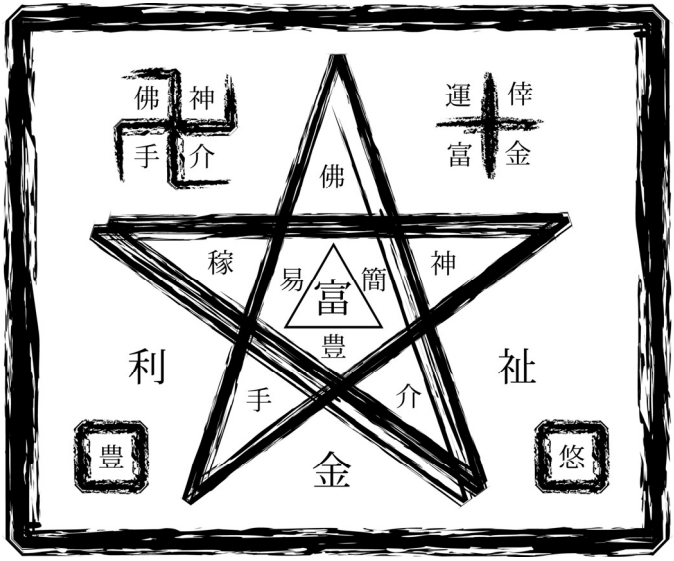
Here are a few symbols to understand how this may look and the types of effects you may gain.

SENDING THE COMMAND

Now, you have your grid, you have the symbol and you are in tune with the universe and linked into its matrix. You have to now send the command. This command is not actually in Japanese, it is in Sanskrit, and most Japanese adepts do not fully understand what they are saying, they are simply repeating the command word that they have been taught. It is similar to the traditional western 'Abracadabra' or use of Latin in Roman Catholic rituals. To do this, you must close the hand around the spell, in a grasping manner and then throw the image out into the universe ahead of you, sending your requests into the universal realm.

This is a very simplistic version and is not meant for use, this art can become complex and can be worked up into a myriad of symbols that are intersected by

geometric shapes which hold complex spells, such as the example that follows.



KUJI-IN

As said above, Kuji can be separated into two main sections, at first we dealt with Kuji-kiri now here we will deal with the second section which is known as Kuji-in.

Kuji-in is familiar to all those who have seen, manga, anime and films about the Ninja. The classic images

of the Shinobi entwining his fingers into 9 magical patterns and deeply enchanting words of evil as he creates destruction on our minds! What in truth is the reality behind the system and what is the system itself?

Kuji can date itself back over 4000 years and while Kuji-Kiri can be classed as Ritual Magic Kuji-in can be classed more as an esoteric form of meditation. The object of Kuji-in is to create a more powerful human, through a series of 9 mental and physical exercises that align your *chi* (spirit or inner energy if you like), give you good posture, connect with ancient parts of the brain, improve alertness, focus mental functions and possibly connect with 'psychic' powers that we as humans may have lost.

Kuji-in consists of three major elements:

THE MUDRA

This is an interlocking of the fingers into patterns. The point of this is based on the fact that the meridians from ancient medicine all cross the ends of your finger tips. By entwining and crossing your fingers you are connecting the meridians of your body and allowing your natural energy to flow in the correct way, or a way that will benefit your intentions.

THE MANTRA

The mantra is a series of Sanskrit words that reflect the power of the Mudra and bring about concentration and energy into the meditation by the sound that they give.

MANDALA

This is a visualization of a certain subject matter that goes with each of the 9 stages. This can include one of the corresponding chakras of your body to one of the 9 Mudras.

Therefore in simple terms, a person would go through a series of 9 meditation sequences that would help empower them with concentration, better physical ability, a deeper mindset and, as the ancients believed, supernatural powers.

1. Rin: Strength of body and mind
2. Kyo: Activates the flow of energy
3. Toh: Development of the relationship between you and the environment
4. Sha: For healing
5. Kai: The development of intuition
6. Jin: To develop inner connections and to perceive what others intend
7. Retsu: True seeing of the world and the universe
8. Zai: To connect with the spirit world and energy of the universe
9. Zen: Enlightenment and completeness

For many people reading this, you may turn up your nose and dismiss these theories. That is a product of a logical world and the one we have been trained in, the people who developed this came from a world of mystique and magic. The measure of 'truth' should not be what you believe to be true, but what the results were as seen by the medieval Japanese when practicing these forms.

Lastly, for those who are extremely sceptical, it is interesting to note that the Japanese did not invent this. The origins of Kuji can be traced back 4000 years and have been used by people across the globe, not just the Ninja. So we have to wonder about the appeal of Kuji, if this is something that has lasted 4000 years passed down by word of mouth, especially if it did not 'work'?

The world of ritual magic is not something that is associated with the Ninja in recent years. The image of the magic Ninja was a concept of the 1980s and has dropped from favour. However, the world of the

Ninja was the feudal setting of medieval Japan and like other medieval settings around the world, magic is at its core. Therefore we can say that ritualised magic is not in essence created or solely associated with Ninjutsu, it would have been a ritualistic system that was prevalent throughout all of Japan at the time. The reason it is included here in this research is because ritualistic magic does appear in the Shoninki, the 1681 manuscript by Natori Masazumi and does form part of his Ninjutsu school.

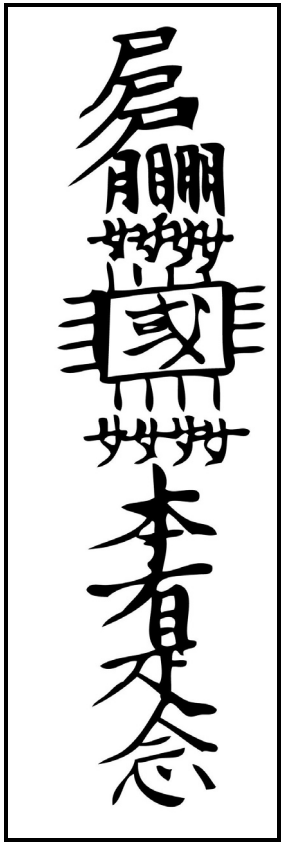
We can say that 'Ninja Magic' falls into three main categories: spells & charms, divination & palm reading and physiognomy.

SPELLS

What is a spell or a charm? A spell or charm is the act of writing down or creating a physical item that will affect the natural world around you through occult means. Natori shows us three major spells that are used by the Ninja.

PROTECTION SPELL

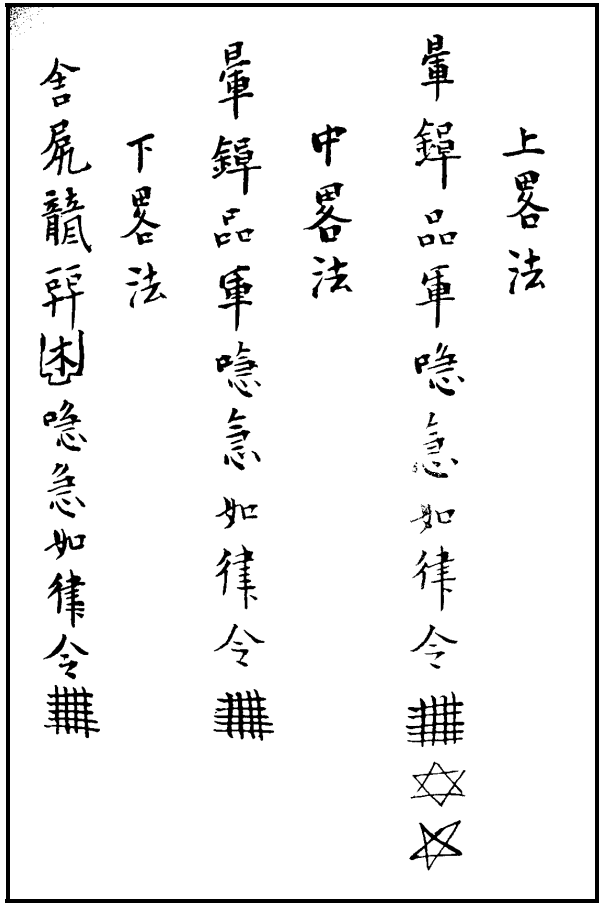
This original spell above was used to protect the home of a Ninja, it was constructed by using various ritualistic elements, like type of paper and positioning within a house. The spell would then act as protection for the Ninja and his home.



TO CHANGE PEOPLES' RELATIONSHIPS

The second spell or charm was to change the relationships of people and their mindset. This delves into true magic, that is the ability to affect the minds of others by the power of the occult arts. The above spell is used to either make two people like each other or on the other hand to make two people dislike each other. The concept was to write the names of the

intended people and then fold the paper over in such a manner that if they touched, the result would be that the individuals would become close and if they did not touch then the relationship would falter. The Ninja was said to use this as a way of making lords fight each other.



PROTECTION WHEN FIGHTING

The final charm that the Ninja gives us is a more common but also a complex one. This is a charm for a warrior and is to be written on red material in the fashion above. This would be carried on a warrior as a charm against swords and arrows, like magical armour to be worn when on a daring mission. Interestingly, for those who have not noticed, the spell has three Kuji-kiri grids. Kuji is an art of ritual magic said to be used by the Ninja, and the basics are to draw this 9 lined grid to start any form of Kuji. Thus, we can see proof that the Ninja did use forms of Kuji magic.

PALM READING

Palmistry is an age-old skill where a reader takes the palm and tells the future through the lines that happen to be on the palm. In the art of Ninjutsu this does appear and the Shoninki does list the types of lines found on a palm into two main types, negative and positive. From here they read a person's life and determined the paths they should take.

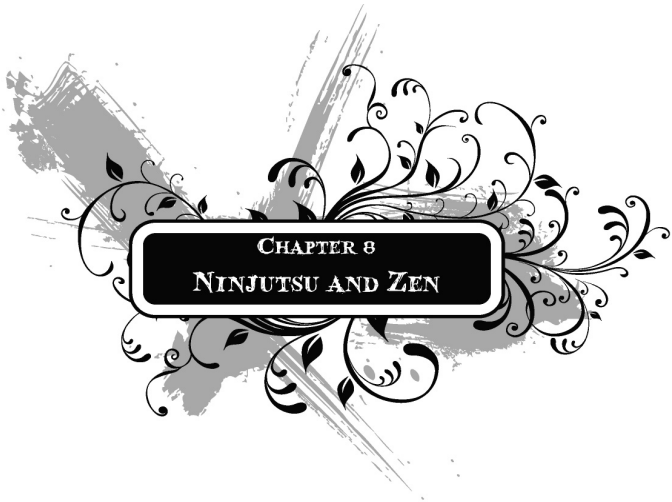
PHYSIOGNOMY

Natori also discusses Physiognomy, the art of telling someone's character by their dimensions and features. Before we scoff at this skill and pass it off as medieval madness we must realise that this was a

profound and respected skill for over two thousand years, from ancient Greece to medieval Europe. With resurgences and declines in has nearly always been in 'modern' human culture. In addition to this there have been new studies into this Physiognomy this decade with positive results. However, Natori the author of the Shoninki confuses the issue more by mixing this ancient 'science' with divination and fortune telling, to the point where the two are inseparable, which is rightly so, considering that science, magic and religion where the same thing for the medieval mind.

NINJA MAGIC?

Now after reading this most people will be put off the Ninja, as modern people we can not comprehend that people took magic seriously. If you do or do not believe in the occult is of little relevance here. What is important is the fact that they, the Ninja believed as did the society around them. The Samurai, the Vikings, the Celts, African tribal warriors, all of these people believed, not because they were simple but because that was their society. The reason for the inclusion of this chapter is that most people misunderstand what Ninjas and magic have in common or how they are connected. All of the above is taken from the Shoninki, a medieval Ninjutsu manual and thus the point of Shinobi Soldiers is to get to the truth of the Ninja, therefore, the above is true Ninja Magic!


Chapter 8
Ninjutsu and Zen

Did a Ninja always complete his mission, did he throw away his life for the assignment, was he expendable? We would think so, the myth tells us that a Ninja was sworn to a mission until death or successes. In fact we could not be more wrong, like the ancient Knight of Europe, who normally did not die in battle but was ransomed back, the Ninja was an expensive commodity, like the Knight he had years of training and was costly to replace, in essence, a dead Ninja is a useless one!

A medieval Ninja called Fujinoissuishi Nawa Sanjūrō Masatake wrote the following statement:

'It is the principal aim for a Shinobi to fulfil their mission without losing their life. Those who can succeed in the mission in the end are described as good Shinobi, no matter if they sometimes get behind schedule or hesitate'

The idea that a Ninja was expendable is a creation of the media and it is possible that it stems from the fact that included in the Ninja philosophies was the idea

of an expendable spy. This was a spy you sent into an area to infiltrate himself but who was expendable and had a set purpose, to give false information or to be caught as a spy to make the opposition feel at ease as catching an enemy scout. These were taken from Chinese classics and are known as *doomed spies*. This is not however, a fully trained Shinobi. We can take from the fact that they used *doomed spies* to mean that they sent people with minimal abilities to be doomed spies and kept their best Shinobi Soldiers as highly prised and respected people. The above Ninja also says that if you are not happy with the environment or the situation it is better to leave the mission undone than to risk it ending in failure. We can see from historical reports that a Ninja's mission was more likely intelligence-gathering than assassination. So unless that scrap of information was more important than the Ninja himself, the priority would probably have been to keep the Ninja alive and use him in another theatre of the war.

We as a modern audience perceive that the Samurai of old feared the Ninja because they would die for the mission, but it seems more obvious that the Samurai of old feared the Ninja not because of this but because they did not know if a Ninja had been there, if a Ninja was one of their friends in the army, if a Ninja had found out the passwords, if a Ninja was watching them there and then, if they would wake to a great fire in the castle, if they would never wake up at all. In fact it is easy to see how the Samurai feared what they could not see or predict and how it was this Adept of Stealth, this abhuman that was never seen

that put the fear of the gods in them. The fear of not knowing and of the unknown far outweighs the fear of knowing, *better the devil you know than the devil you don't*, would be the best sentiment for this.

Much of the credibility of the Ninja lay in the fact that the Ninja code went against the Samurai ethos of honour, particularly dying with honour. A Ninja would be at odds with Samurai ethics in that he would 'fail' in order to be of better use than to die and be of no use. This opens a massive debate about those Samurai who learned Ninjutsu? Surely the ethics of a Ninja when crossed with a Samurai upbringing would be a contradiction. But in the same theme a Samurai existence is in contradiction to a Buddhist philosophy, so in essence the Samurai was a contradiction from the start. Also, like the knights of Europe we have idealised their chivalric nature and romanticised their actions. In no way should you think that the Samurai was not honourable or that the knight was not chivalric, but you have to consider that they were real ideals of the time and ideas that were upheld by humans and prone to human corruption. I am a great believer in the authenticity of chivalric codes but the reality I see as not so very simplistic as the ideal. To be chivalric to your own class was deemed socially necessary, yet there was no need to be chivalric to lower orders, as we also see dishonour and elements of treacherous behaviour in the Samurai class. Thus we should respect the Ninja for their ability to adapt and accept failure and for the realisation of their own worth, such a contradiction to the projected view of a culture who are ready to

throw their lives away. Lastly, you should contemplate that what we would class as ‘not achievable’ would not be so for any man trained as highly as the Ninja were. When we say *they failed a mission* you can be sure that a Shinobi Soldier had tried every avenue and every possibility and only retreated when nothing was left for them to try. That was their code of honour.

Next time you are out in public look about you at the mass crowds. Now compare the Ninja to a modern day terrorist: they can strike at will, they can be anyone and they have no fear of killing anyone.

Chapter 9
Interviews with Leading
Authorities

DEFENSE AGAINST A NINJA
AN INTERVIEW WITH OTAKE SENSEI

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE KATORI SHINTO-RYU AND OTAKE SENSEI

Tenshinsho-den Katori Shinto-Ryu to give it its full name is the oldest sword school in Japan. Originating in the late 15th century was founded by Lord Iizasa Choisai allegedly awarded a divine scroll from a god in the shape of a boy. The school derives its name from the Katori Jinju shrine in Narita, where the founder is now buried. As this is the oldest sword school (with all of its internal sub-schools) to be

registered and recognized in Japan it is elementary to declare that this school can also claim to be the oldest form of Ninjutsu still to be taught today, as no other body has evidence to predate Katori Shinto-Ryu's origin. Otake Sensei was born in Chiba in 1926, in 1942 he entered the sword school to understand courage and to find a path to valour and the strength to fight in the war if called upon.

THE INTERVIEW

On the 12th day of August 2009 the author drove down the dusty country roads to the home of Otake Sensei, the headmaster of the Katori Shinto-Ryo, the oldest sword school in all Japan. After an erratic and somewhat roundabout taxi trip the author and his translator arrived at the door of the house to be greeted by a pleasant and warm 81 year old man in a blue Jimbai, a form of old casual wear. Otake Sensei and the two visitors sat in his main room and awaited tea and cake, brought by an aging and very polite wife. Most people visit Otake Sensei to gain knowledge of his old and profound sword school, this visit was for a matter very different. As the headmaster of the school, Otake Sensei was privilege to many things, but the most interesting part of his school's curriculum is the way of Ninjutsu. This is one of the best kept secrets of the 'Ninja world', this swordsman is legacy to a 500 year old oral tradition of Ninjutsu. What adds an extra flare of excitement is the fact that the reason that this school teaches

Ninjutsu is to teach its swordsman a very skilful art and that is the art of *defence against a Ninja.*

"In our school there is nothing about learning Ninjutsu itself and nothing that is recorded within our ancient scrolls. All the knowledge that I have obtained comes from our founder and has been passed down by word of mouth for over 500 years. This is the true way of defending yourself from a Ninja."

Otake Sensei states that this information has never been recorded before, whilst the interview took place Otake Sensei was in the process of writing this down for the first time for a magazine in Japan. The school records many things by written scroll, but it says it passes its Ninjutsu teachings by word of mouth alone.

"Those who tame dogs as a skill would ask how urgent the job was when they got an offer or contract. If the job wasn't urgent they could then use their time to tame the said animal by methods such as feeding or befriending the animal. Or if the need was urgent, they could give a female dog to male or a male dog to female. Also a Shinobi would lure a dog out of its area by food and then proceed to beat the animal badly. They did this whilst applying a selected scent such as whale oil. This was done so that the dog would remember the sent at night and fear would then grip the dog as it would recall the

near-death beating it had received at the hands of the Ninja. As a result the dog would run away or cower after giving forth a short bark and investigation into a disturbance. Only those who know this skill could know that a Shinobi might be there and upon hearing such a reaction from a guard-dog a Samurai from our school would take up a bow and shoot into the darkness with the hope of hitting the Shinobi."

A selection of manuscripts, talk about dogs as the enemy of the Ninja and of how to deal with them. The Shoninki and the Katori Shinto Ryu deal out drastic and deadly punishments for guard dogs, whist in contrast the Gunpo scrolls give a confidence incantation to give you will power over the dog in question.

"Those Shinobi good at hiding between trees could move around from treetop to treetop as quickly as squirrels. Also, when climbing up a tree, they used their sword as a stepladder or foothold and by lifting themselves up by holding the tree with one arm. They then retrieved their sword by the means of a long cord which they had attached to their weapon. They also climbed by swinging a long wet cloth with a snapping action around a branch and ascending from that point."

The image of a Ninja using his sword as a foothold and then retrieving it via a long cord is iconic now in

the ‘Ninjutsu’ world and many references have been made to it. However, Otake Sensei here demonstrated two other techniques. The first was to ‘hug’ the tree with one arm and shimmy up the trunk with his other hand free, presumably for his sword. The second skill was to get a long cloth and soak it in water, then swing the heavy cloth around a branch and let the weight of the wet material wrap around the limb and take hold, thus a Ninja could then ascend.

“When a Shinobi aims to steal documents or something of the like, they sometimes achieve this by taking three mice with them on a mission. They steal into the house when everyone has fallen asleep and let a single mouse go to create a fuss. After the people have settled back down and asleep again he Shinobi lets the second mouse enter. This makes the household think that there is an infestation of mice and the house awakens to deal with the problem, during this confusion the Shinobi can steal what he wants without effort after that. This is one way of taming animals, a swordsman of my school should understand this trick.”

The author discussed this point with Nakashima Sensei a renowned Ninja Researcher, who fully supports the idea of Ninja using animals as part of their arsenal. There are several accounts within the scrolls of using animals for misdirection. Nakashima Sensei also went on to describe that a Shinobi would use this trick to get the occupants to leave a said room

as they would almost certainly leave the room to find the source of the infestation.

NINJA QUESTIONS
AN INTERVIEW WITH NAKASHIMA SENSEI
PART ONE

Friday the 25th of September 2009 saw a sleepy author and his trusted aide Yoshie Misawa at Hanada internal airport as the sun rose over Tokyo city. The destination was Hiroshima, the man to meet was Dr Nakashima. Dr Nakashima is one of Japan's leading researchers on the subject of Ninjutsu and holds a large percentage of its treasures, from scrolls to handheld weapons. Having written two books on the

subject and been an advisor to TV and being one of the few men to have translated the ancient Ninja documents into modern Japanese, Dr Nakashima is the one man to answer the questions that we need to dispel the myth of the Ninja and to gain a true picture of what they really were like. The interview consisted of 12 hours of eating meals, driving around the splendid coastline and chatting way in seaside restaurants. Therefore as an interview it was hard to record. My solution was to record it in two parts, the first section is a collection of questions I asked during our beautiful drive around the coast. The second is a selection of notable statements that Nakashima Sensei said throughout the day.

QUESTIONS:

Antony: Do you believe that the Ninja have existed into the modern day and is their an unbroken lineage from then until now?

Dr Nakashima: No, in my opinion, the Ninja died out and blended out of society during the Edo period and eventually their skills diminished and until they were no longer in existence.

Antony: So what happened to them?

Dr Nakashima: It's my belief that the Ninja moved into areas such as firework display teams and other entertainments like that. Their skills were highly sort after and the knowledge of explosives was a premier one. I think that they moved into this type of field and

then their skills continued but not under the name of Ninja.

At this point Nakashima Sensei produced a 'Ninja rifleman's scroll' that he had on him. Showing how in the later periods they developed more reliance on firearms and other activities.

Antony: Do you know what martial arts the Ninja used, is there any historical evidence that tells us what forms they studied?

Dr Nakashima: No, there are no historical documents that support what martial arts they did. Ninjas of course used martial arts but Ninjutsu itself is not a martial art. It's strange but a Ninja was a farmer/spy until he was hired by a samurai then he became a Bushi, or of the warrior class while he was a retainer of that lord. Fujita Seiko claimed that the Ninja used Nabansato-ryu but it's quite erratic and would be of no use against a sword. Also, my master warned me about Takamatsu and Fujita Sensei, he trained with them, and to be polite he said they could not be trusted 100%.

Antony: What about assassination? Is their evidence for Ninjas as assassins?

Dr Nakashima: Not really, all the scrolls point to infiltration for information, there is not much about killing. However, they were adept at poisons, so it's possible. If a Ninja was to kill, it was probably if he was to be caught, or needed to get past someone. It's

more than likely that the Ninja did not get into any sort of duel but killed from behind and quickly, so he could continue to spy.

Antony: Did the Ninja ever use the iconic 'devil mask' that we have seen?

Dr Nakashima: the what?

Antony: Some 'Ninja Masters' claim that people used a devil mask to create fear, it's quite a well-known image in the west.

Dr Nakashima: It's possible, but I have never heard of it, there is no evidence for it.

Antony: How can you tell a fake Ninjutsu teacher or someone who does not know much about Ninjutsu, from an academic level?

Dr Nakashima: Well, I suspect that Ninjutsu died out in the Edo period, so by teacher if you mean someone who has researched Ninjutsu then one of the best ways to know if someone does not know very much is the subject of high, middle or low Ninja. In Japanese we say Jonin, Chunin, Genin. These three words do appear in the Ninja scrolls but years ago they were interpreted wrongly. Most people think that there is hierarchy in this order and that they give orders via this system. This is incorrect. The NIN in Jo-nin, is the Kanji for Ninja but the Kanji in the other two mean person. Thus it's 'High-Ninja' 'Middle person' or 'low-person'. So, Jonin, means a

person who is a Ninja and has amazing abilities, he is a Jo-nin. However, his status in the clan may be very low. Remember Japan was a clan state where family blood ties and social rank come from your birth, so a Jonin could be lowborn but be an amazing Ninja. A Genin or ‘low person’ simply meant the common folk that you get to do elements of infiltration for you, it has nothing to do with being a Ninja, it is their social status. If a person has told you or wrote about the three stage system then they are not correct and you should take what they say with a pinch of salt.

DID THE ARCHETYPE NINJA EXIST - AND OTHER STATEMENTS

AN INTERVIEW WITH NAKASHIMA SENSEI PART TWO

Friday the 25th of September 2009 and the day is closing and the sun is setting over a plate of steak and some card tricks performed by Nakashima Sensei as we continue our interview from last time.

The following is a selection of topics that we talked about throughout the day. Most correspond to the

amazing collection of relatively unknown Ninja scrolls that Dr Nakashima had with him on the day.

I

We think from one image in the scrolls that a Ninja would use the skin of a dog over his head and back, to hide as though he was a sleeping dog. This way he could lie in the shadows but within the enemy area and be relatively safe.

II

A Ninja when entering an enemy castle before his commander attacks the castle would write his name on the wall as proof that he had been there. This is so when the castle fell to the Ninjas forces, the warlord could see the name of his agent written on the wall and the Ninja would gain fame from such exploits.

III

In the Shoninki it says that Ninjutsu is like a void and we are running into it, I take this to mean that Ninjutsu is ever changing and that a Ninja must adapt to the skills and social movements around them. This is maybe why they moved profession to such things as firework display teams.

VI

There is a floating bride, quite like a pole with floats at each end, this was so that a Ninja could float down a river or across a moat and use the pole as a rest for his firearm, he could shoot from the water where most people would not expect a shot to come from.

V

A Ninja would head in the direction of the stars or illuminated clouds when approaching a position. This is because anything that is in front of you becomes silhouetted against the skyline as you reach it, allowing you to not run straight into it!

VI

The line between a Ninja and a thief is so close it's difficult to tell the difference, they crossed that line many times and it's difficult to understand where thief and Ninja are separate.

VII

You must throw away desire to be a Ninja. You can not chase money or wealth, status or position. You

must see everything as transient and use life to your advantage. I want to write a book about the gifts that the Ninja have left for us, a way to live life.

VIII

We know that in moats they would put underwater spikes to fend off or defend against Ninja.

MY FINAL QUESTION:

Antony: Nakashima Sensei, the Ninja were a set of people that existed over a thousand years, we know that they came in many shapes and sizes and that there were many levels of operative. It is my quest to find the truth behind Ninjutsu and I want to know if the archetypal Ninja existed. By that I mean, was there a mountain village where children were brought up being trained in the arts of the Ninja, was there a village of Ninjas where as an adult a member of that village was by profession, a Ninja? Many people, disbelieve that the Ninja existed as a person and that Ninjutsu is just a skill used by normal people. If I were to say that Ninjas did not exist, that Ninjutsu was a set of skills used by a selection of people who were warriors but trained in espionage would you agree with this?

Dr Nakashima: First it is 100% true that the Ninja existed, they were labelled as such and that was their profession (as well as farmers). Furthermore, the

archetypal Ninja you talk about did exist, in Iga and Koka. They did indeed have mountain villages and they did train to be Ninja and they did exist as a group of people. We have two sets of Kanji that can be read as Shinobi, the original word for the Ninja and the more popular one can be read as Ninja or Shinobi, that is where we get the word Ninja from. Both have connotations of stealth and stealing-in. So, yes, be assured the Ninja did exist and they were good at what they did.

To add further to Dr Nakashima's words we know from the Gunpo manual that an army would use Shinobi and depending on the level of those Shinobi and what they were needed for a clan would hire 'men of Iga' (the Ninja homeland) to train people in the ways of Ninjutsu.

AFTERTHOUGHT

We have arrived at a deconstructed image of the Ninja, exactly where we need to be at the end of this book. The aim of Shinobi Soldiers volume I, is to break open the myth of the Japanese Ninja, something that we have indeed achieved. The next step in this mission of bringing about a revolution in the image of the Ninja is to identify what it meant to be a Shinobi in the medieval period and to build a picture of life as a Shinobi. *Volume I* has told you what a Ninja is not, *Volume II* will concentrate on what a Ninja is.

The image of the Ninja has been so disfigured by the media and by pretend modern 'Ninjutsu masters' that it is difficult to separate the facts. This investigation is on going, and like or historical research it is full of false turns, pitfalls, lacking evidence and misrepresentation. It is my intention to bring the truth even if we have to struggle through the maze of misguidance first!

VOLUME II

A FURTHER INVESTIGATION

THE NEXT INSTALMENT

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Antony Cummins holds a BA in Ancient History & Archaeology and also an MA degree in Archaeology. He is an author, illustrator and artist based in Manchester, England. Antony writes for the UK martial arts magazine *Combat* and is a martial arts instructor. He has an intense passion for **historical** Ninjutsu, and is the first person to bring an historical Ninjutsu manual to an English audience.

Tai Jutsu is a set of techniques.
To Understand dynamic movement in combat
you must first understand
The Principles.

The Dignity of Flying Birds
SCHOOL OF WAR
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FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THE KUJI ELEMENTS OF THIS BOOK, PLEASE VISIT:

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